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ROSE OF THE WORLD

BY

KATHLEEN NORRIS

PALO ALTO EDITION

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ROSE OF THE WORLD

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CHAPTER I

In the streaming level rays of a late April afternoon a rakish-looking gray roadster turned into Old Mill Lane and worked its way carefully among the gossiping women, the baby-carriages, an old wagon or two with a shabby horse drowsing between the shafts, running children, and all the disorder of a small and congested thoroughfare into which a populace, long rain-bound, has turned itself for the first taste of real summer warmth.

Old Mill Lane was narrow, and ended after two twisted blocks of dingy houses and cottages, straggling fences, and huddled small stores upon the banks of the river. Here there was a small brick factory or two, tottering warehouses, and the patched and decayed old building that gave the place its name. Over the lane great locusts and maples already cast a dappled green shade, motionless to-day in the untimely still heat, but sometimes moving graciously, to throw over the distempered walls of a girl's upstairs bedroom a delicious pattern of gleams and shadows.

Across the muddy currents of the Potrero Creek, dignified by the residents of Gates Mill as "the river," lay straggling fences, rising fields where barley and wheat waved in summer, and the humble scattered roofs of small

farmers shaded by willows and eucalyptus trees. The winding course of the stream left many a pebbly island and stretch of shingle, and boys bathed and screamed there from May until almost Thanksgiving. And only one block back of Old Mill Lane, and at a right angle to it as much as any straight thing may be angled to one essentially crooked, was River Street itself, the real business district of Gates Mill, where there were plate-glass shop-fronts lettered in severe gold, and the awninged windows of Rogers's Bank, and the specialty shops: "Yvonne, Millinery," and "Polly Perkins' Kiddy Togs," and "Ye Pewter Teapotte Gifte Shoppe."

Old residents of Gates Mill were justifiably proud of River Street, and to the younger generation it seemed a miracle of beauty and cosmopolitanism; Sally Pottle, who often visited an aunt in San Francisco, said that there were no handsomer shops in San Francisco, and Juliet Barker, who had been to New York, always asserted stoutly that you could buy prettier dresses, and cheaper, in Bond & Howard's than you could on Fifth Avenue.

Perhaps the shopkeepers of Gates Mill knew their customers' taste, or perhaps the California climate, with its mild winters, its burning dry summer days with no touch of dampness in the heat, and its chill summer evenings, when the girls must carry wraps after nine o'clock on the very Fourth of July itself, demanded a certain sort of merchandise. Certain it is that their big windows were tempting to every woman's heart in Gates Mill on a day like to-day, when after weeks of hesitant spring, and half-a-dozen days of fog and rain, summer had suddenly burst in all its glory, and the shabbiest little mother could linger wistfully before

striped pink and blue ginghams, and the best-equipped girl long to add one more flowery dimity to her filled wardrobe. All the world was abroad now, in the gracious, lingering close of the enervating day, and from the time that Bond & Howard had run up the big window shades upon the sun's departure from Carondelet Street, at five minutes past four, a crowd of women had gathered before it on the sidewalk to stare in rapture at the June bride shown within.

There were only two persons in the gray roadster when it turned into Old Mill Lane, and one of these was a girl, and she was talking about the June bride in Bond & Howard's window. There was an excellent probability of her being a June bride herself, and the subject was naturally to her the most fascinating in the world.

Her companion was the man whose wife she had promised to be—a fine, tall, loose-built young man, with a florid, firm skin, fair hair sleeked back under his cap, large white teeth that gave his big mouth a somewhat humorous look, and clothes that, if somewhat dirty and rumpled, were unquestionably correct: homespun, fine linen, and heavy driving gloves, soiled but not worn.

He brought the car to a standstill before a certain dilapidated dwelling, crowded uncomfortably between an encroaching fruit and soda shop and a cheap and disorderly block of six small dwelling houses badly in need of carpenter and painter, and trapped in a tangle of oblong, languishing, neglected front yards, and for a few minutes he and the girl sat where they were, murmuring and laughing before the inevitable minute of parting.

"Yep, you like that veil and orange-blossom stuff well enough in Bond's window," he said now, in a half-laughing, half-teasing voice, watching the glowing face near him, as though he cared more for the changing expression there than for any opinion of his that influenced it. "But when it comes to yourself, by golly, then you want to slip off some morning and get married in your bathing suit!"

"Oh, *me!*" said Rosalind Kirby, negligently, as though the subject held no further interest.

"Well, isn't it true?" he persisted.

"Jack, darling, but imagine my trailing all that glory into this house!" the girl countered, unruffled. "Why, that dress and veil would cost more than my whole trousseau! It would be idiotic for me to plan any such wedding as that—everything else would have to be in keeping: Cecily would have to be bridesmaid in a new frock, and I suppose Audrey would shriek herself black in the face unless she could be flower girl——"

"I see that young one being flower girl!" interpolated Jack, with a fraternal grin, as Rosalind's amused voice stopped.

"Well, imagine it! And then Mom would have to have the usual pearl-gray silk with violets in her hat——"

"Why don't you charge it all?" suggested Mr. Talbot, easily. "We'll get scads of checks from my Eastern cousins and everybody. You can pay it all off afterward."

"Yes, I see myself!" Rosalind assured him, in calm scorn.

There was a slight pause; time was not lost to the pair, however, for Jack had pulled off his glove, and her bare,

soft little left hand was held in his big right one. Now with her other hand Rosalind suddenly pushed back her small, close hat, and smiled at him wearily, a little tired and warm after the long day.

Jack smiled back, as well he might, for Rosalind Kirby, with all sorts of troubles and responsibilities heaped high upon her slender twenty-one-year-old shoulders, was of that challenging and indisputable beauty that sometimes sets one girl apart, in a small town, from all the other girls who count their merely comparative charms by the standard she has quite unconsciously set.

The hair she had partially uncovered was of burned gold, soft as corn silk where the little hat had crushed it, curling into crescents and rings over her broad low forehead and about her ears, and plastered into little feathers here and there against the white skin, where the heat of the day had dampened it. Her eyes were burning sapphire blue edged with upcurling thick lashes that the sun to-night was turning to bronze, and her skin had the healthy fairness of an apricot. Jack loved to see it pale, when she was unusually earnest or concerned, and to see the bright flame colour surge through the warm cream of it when he praised it. Rosalind's nose was straight, and her mouth wide and clean and finely red over small white even teeth, but what gave the whole face its elusive quality of distinction and beauty was the indescribable line of cheek bones just a hint high, upper lip just a hint short, chin and jaw exquisitely modelled, throat pure and round, and the aristocratic carriage of the whole head. When Rosalind chose to be haughty, when she said to Jack, "Dog, to your kennel! You may kill, but you cannot frighten

a gentlewoman of France!" Jack used sometimes to catch his breath in sheer wonder at the force and the vitality of even so casual an impersonation.

She wore a rumpled shirtwaist of cheap voile piped in blue, to-day, and a linen skirt twisted by many washings and stained by rust marks from hooks and eyes. Rosalind, in the long office afternoon, had already had time to reflect disconsolately that these untimely warm days were costly—everything she wore would have to be changed for fresh to-morrow, and that meant laundering to-night. But she was not thinking of that now; she was stretched luxuriously in the low-slung car, glad to rest, glad to reflect upon the Elks' Annual Concert and Benefit Dance at the Gates Mill Grand Opera House to-night, and in the company she liked best in the world.

"Jack, it's an awful mess for you to marry into!" she said now, not for the first, nor for the fifty-first time.

Jack made no answer; he had her hand tightly, but he was dreaming, with his eyes far across the river on the fields and farms, with their yellowing lights and long shadows.

"Grandpa's less than useless," mused Rosalind; "Mother—well, she says she'll take roomers. I can just see a sign 'Furnished Rooms' on that gate. Poor Mom—she's fought that off for eight long years, since long before Father died. Cecily will have to work, I suppose. Maybe it'll turn out all right, but it seems so selfish, just walking out on them all!"

"In the first place," said Jack, coming suddenly out of his dream, "it's only for a time, we know that. You'll soon be able to help. I get two hundred now——"

"Jack Talbot, you don't!"

"I do. Since the last Directors' Meeting—Clyde Bain-

bridge suggested it; Dad thought it was awfully decent of him. It made a hit with Dad. Yep. Two hundred. And my mother has always said that she would give me a house when I got married. One of the bungalows out Moncada Way, huh?"

"I get forty-five," Rosalind said, slowly, her cheeks red. Her job was in the Talbot Iron Works, as stenographer and clerk to Jack's father.

"I know. It's rotten. But then you're going to get married anyway, and what's the diff? I know I'm not worth it, but after all, Dad owns the whole shebang," Jack said, watching her expressive face uneasily. "I wasn't going to tell you, but we could live on that, couldn't we?"

"Oh, heavens!" said Rosalind, shaking the odd look of musing resentment from her face, and brightening suddenly. "live on it? My dear, there's many a month when my money is all *we* live on, Grandpa and the girls and Mom and all. Of course, we own the house, such as it is, or rather I do. My father left everything to me, you know, on the very day he died—everything, in this case, representing the dear old home, value about two thousand eight hundred and forty-six dollars and eleven cents, and a five-hundred-dollar life-insurance policy!" she ended, half-sad, half-whimsical.

"What was the idea of leaving it to you? Didn't it make your mother mad?" Jack asked, curiously.

"Mom? It was her idea. She begged and pleaded and fussed until it was done that way. Grandpa's—you know."

"Sure," Jack said, with a quick, sympathetic nod. Old Man Tallifer was half-witted, able and proud to wipe dishes, and bring wood, and putter patiently with

weeds, but younger than eight-year-old Audrey where responsibility was concerned.

"Well, and Mom is an absolute baby about business matters—hates them. You know, John Rossiter Talbot—I may call you Rossiter after we're married," Rosalind diverged, musingly, looking up at him through her eyelashes with a speculative air. "It could be 'J. Rossiter' on your cards.—'Rossiter, dear, doesn't the house seem cold to you? Rossiter is so busy now, Mrs. Rogers, I don't know that we can accept——'" she experimented, mincingly.

"What's *your* middle name, you poor half-wit?" Jack questioned, highly amused. "If you have one!"

"My dear Jack, when people have come down in the world, and their house is suddenly surrounded by a slum, and they have nothing but losses, accidents, misfortunes, and gradual disintegration, their children always have middle names!" Rosalind said, gaily. "Mom and Daddy went to San Francisco on their honeymoon, and Julia Marlowe was playing 'As You Like It,' and just a year later I was christened Rosalind Ruth Tallifer Kirby, and Cecily, four years later, was of course Cecilia, Cecilia Marie Thérèse Carter Kirby, and Ned is Edward Sidney Tennyson—Mom was reading Tennyson then, presumably—and Audrey was to be Audrey, boy or girl, and Audrey she is! You're marrying into the most distinguished family in Gates Mill—did you but ken it! Why, isn't the Union High School the Tallifer School, and didn't Grandpa give them the lot and one thousand dollars? And wasn't he the first mayor—poor old soul? Jack, how different it might all have been but for that accident—your father limping all the rest of his days and poor old Grandpa like a

child! Let it be a warning to you, my boy," ended Rosalind, sententiously, indicating the speedometer, "to watch that arrow!"

"Because your aged grandfather was once driving behind a fast horse owned and driven at the moment by my equally respected father," Jack countered, "and because both gents crashed into a railroad train, looped the loop, and smashed themselves in the bean, permanently injuring my father's right limb and sense of humour, and reducing your grandfather to something a very *little* below the family average of intelligence, is, I gather, a reason why I should not speed?"

"Jack, I really *don't* think you should make fun of my grandfather!" Rosalind said, bubbling mirth. "No, but really, he was the brains of the family," she added, more seriously. "My father was a darling, of course, but he never could make money at anything. And Mother had a brother, you know, Uncle Ed, who wasted what little was left her. I think that's why she wanted me to be responsible for whatever was left when Daddy died. She trusts me. Poor Mom!" Rosalind added, with one of her lightning changes of mood. "I feel so sorry for her. I was in the Library at noon, and Miss Gately was saying that it was Grandpa's Encyclopædias that they have there—he gave them, and lots of other books—books that came round the Horn from the old home in Maryland in the year 'Sixty. I'm going to tell Mom; that sort of thing tickles her almost to death. And by the way, I've got to go in!—Goodbye, darling, until—about eight?" finished Rosalind, suddenly bestirring herself and jumping from the car, with only a farewell pressure of the hand to gratify watching Old Mill Lane.

"Good-bye, you little exquisite sweetheart," Jack said, reluctantly. "My golly, I could talk to you all night!"

"Oh, by the way"—she had half-turned; now she turned suddenly back—"by the way, did you tackle your mother?"

"Well—isn't it the darnedest thing the way we leave the important things until the last minute?" he broke off to ask pathetically. "Hanged if I know what you and I talk about, we never get anything *said*, anyway. Yep, I kind of tackled my mother—in a way. I'll tell you all about it to-night."

"How do you mean 'kind of,' and 'in a way'?" Rosalind asked, straightforwardly and anxiously.

"Well, I said that you and I were always together, and she said—she said, 'Oh, she knew *that*, all right.' And then I said that for months—since before Christmas—we had been regularly engaged, and she said, 'Oh, it's definite, is it?' And I said yes. And then she said she thought it was the limit—I'm not using her words, of course."

"Of course!" Rosalind echoed, impatiently, with a worried laugh.

"So then—well, she said not to be in too much of a hurry, something like that. She didn't take it seriously. You know, I always said she wouldn't be pleased—not at first, not if it was any girl, anywhere!" Jack added, uncomfortably.

"Yes, I know. And she's right!" Rosalind said, slowly, with serious eyes and a little nod. But she was stabbed to the heart. The cruelty, the selfish cold snobbishness of a fortunate and happy woman, herself still young, who could meet her only son's confidence

in this spirit! Rosalind could hear the cultured voice: "Oh, it's definite, Jackie dear? Dear me, aren't you sure of yourselves? Well, you'll be in and out of love a dozen times before the right girl comes along! Have your happy time, but don't be in a hurry, dear!"

"Well, tell me everything to-night," she ended, abruptly, and with a somewhat strained little smile she pushed the shabby old weather-stained wooden gate, and vanished in the tree shadows and overgrown bushes of the disreputable old dooryard.

CHAPTER II

It was always with a lightened heart, yet with a little conscious buckling on of the domestic armour, that Rosalind Kirby came home. To her the dinginess, the decay and disorder, only spelled a comfortable familiarity. She had never known any other environment than these faded, old-fashioned gloomy rooms, these porches with their fat, peeling balustrades and chipped planks, this kitchen with its rusty old zinc and battered tin, its great brick range whose cracked top showed a merry flaming of wood between sunken and dilapidated iron plates.

The old walnut hat rack in the side passage, the stringy strip of oilcloth still preserving the faded moquette in the hall, the stair rods, missing on every third step, the horsechair sofa, and the what-not, the one bathroom that smelled of leaky pipes and strong soap, the square piano always out of tune, the battered books and dimmed pictures—these were not the forty-year-old rubbish that they might have been to the Kirby children. These were simply details in the heart-warming centre of the world, simply an inseparable part of home.

The front rooms—a long, dark parlour, and opposite it a library—were of use only conversationally. It was gratifying, it was genteel, to speak of the parlour and the library. But back of the parlour was a small room, once the office of the doctor who had built the place,

and this was the "living room," filled with skates and mud and lamps and mismated chairs and arithmetics and odd magazines, and an old square piano, with a bottle of Audrey's cough medicine on the black marble mantel, next to the two big Sèvres vases—the whole one and the cracked one. Back of the library was the dining room, with a dismal bay window jutting out into the north side of the garden, where there were cypress and firs and eucalyptus and willows, and a dismal dreary stretch of bottle-edged path never stepped upon and always green with slippery moss.

Mrs. Kirby was a pretty forty-five, faded and mild, and with her once magnificent burned-gold hair, like Rosalind's, long ago streaked with gray and made lifeless through neglect. She was a loving, willing slave to the whole family, but singularly ineffective and given to amazing complacencies. The house, built by her husband's uncle, the long-dead Uncle Jim Kirby, who was the older of two astonishingly successful brothers fifty years ago, had once been the handsomest in Gates Mill. The old wood engravings of "Welsh Peasants" and "Franklin at the Court of France," the Rogers group and the carved ivory box from Canton, had once been the boast of the tiny pioneer community. The Tallifers and the Kirbys had been the aristocrats of the place.

To Mrs. Kirby, nothing had changed. She had been a belle and a beauty; she felt herself still one. The home had been valuable and magnificent, to her it still was so. No matter how prosperous any newcomer in Gates Mill was, it was enough for her that he was neither a Tallifer nor a Kirby. She talked reverently of the "chaise longue," of the clock representing in bronze

two Roman senators seated in majestically flowing draperies upon a real marble bench with lion heads for arms. This clock did not work; it was under a smooth dome of clear glass finished by a chenille tie with tassels. Rosalind, years ago, had loved to run her little hands above the cool glass, when the "senator clock" came reverently down for a good washing.

All the rooms were finished inside with folding shutters in clean brown wood; electricity had never been installed. There was a sense of distance, of isolation, in the parlour and the library. The affronting noises of Old Mill Lane came softened here; the furniture gave out creaks and cracks; the light, tempered through the shades and the old lace and rep curtains, softened with rot, and filtered besides through the thick foliage of the front-yard trees, was greenish and unearthly.

But the kitchen was homelike and friendly, and it was here that most of the life of the family went on. The harmless, muttering old man came down here early in the dark winter, or the dewy summer mornings, when rain was falling dismally over the bare willows, or when a million birds were carolling in the big trees, and when his daughter came down in her chocolate percale wrapper there was always a good fire. In fact, Grandpa Tallifer did all the heavy work of breakfast-getting, and not infrequently set the table and made the coffee. Rosalind, hopping down in her pink cotton kimono, with her boots polished and her hair dressed for the long day at the Iron Works, was frequently the second comer. Cecilia, Ned, and Audrey were school-children still, tardy and irresponsible. Life straggled rather than progressed in the Kirby house.

Rosalind to-night went straight through the side pas-

sage into the kitchen. The atmosphere there was several degrees hotter than anywhere else; Mrs. Kirby, as dreamily inefficient here as in every other capacity, was having veal cutlets and fried potatoes on this heavy spring evening. Cecilia was sauntering back and forth with the airy superiority of sixteen, strewing forks and napkin rings indifferently upon the crumpled tablecloth. Ned, idling upon a collapsed lounge in the dining room, occasionally gave her directions which she studiously ignored. Audrey, aged eight, was in disgrace because she had been driven to the last stages of exasperation by the tight elastic in a bloomer leg and had cut it deliberately; "deliberately cut through that good new elastic that Miss Sally put in there!" Mrs. Kirby kept reiterating severely.

Completing the group was Grandpa Tallifer, a magnificent old giant of seventy-five, who for thirty-five of those years had been gently, harmlessly insane. Grandpa Tallifer stood six feet three in his stocking-feet, and was broad in proportion. His face had the long cheek lines and heavy jaw that suggest a mastiff, and a leonine mane of milky white hair enveloped the handsome old head and fell in majestic locks on the broad shoulders. His complexion had the bright clearness of a child's, and his eyes were sky blue.

Grandpa invariably wore a spotless white shirt, open at the throat, and a baggy old corduroy suit that was always shabby but always scrupulously clean. His manners were those of a gentleman, a somewhat bewildered gentleman who finds himself for no good reason supplanted as the head of his household. He talked well, and could recall persons and events in connection with Gates Mill's early history long forgotten

or outlived by all the rest of the world. He had been a power in the early development of the town, an earnest, clean-living, far-sighted, and public-spirited citizen. He seemed unable to realize what had happened to displace him.

Did he remember the sweet September morning thirty-five years ago upon which he had started, with Jack Talbot's father, the present President of the Iron Works that were then in their very infancy, to inspect a site out toward the cemetery neighbourhood for the County Farm? Talbot had been driving his white stallion, and sometimes even now, Rosalind, listening to her grandfather's earnest, meaningless talk, would wonder if his last speech, as a sane man, had not been, "This is a pretty fresh horse, Si."

At all events, he said this now, over and over. "Si Talbot drives the meanest horse in this town," he would say, mildly, to little Audrey, or to restless Ned. And perhaps twice a year he would walk slowly out to the Iron Works, a notable figure in his broad-brimmed hat and well-worn old suit, and reason patiently with his old friend, now the prosperous J. Wittinger Talbot, about the stallion. "Crows' meat, Si, that's all he's good for!" old Tallifer would say persuasively and smilingly.

Talbot had been smashed to the wreck of a man when the stallion bolted; he limped still, suffered a reminiscent ache here, a treacherous catch of the muscles there. Tallifer had lain for but one irrevocable minute beside the road, the mane of hair—golden then—silent against a rock. He had got immediately upon his feet, physically untouched indeed, but with the delicate machinery of the brain for ever unbalanced.

Sometimes he called Rosalind "Molly," confusing her with her mother, sometimes "Abby," thinking himself a half-century younger and the girl her own grandmother. He might go to Cecilia in distress: to ask, who was this pleasant young lady who was having lunch with them? Or he might struggle with babyish tears: this young woman had been at his strong box and had taken away papers of the gravest importance.

"Why, that's Rose, Grandpa!" Cecy would assure him, in tender and affectionate amusement. Or, "That's just Ned, Grandpa, he wouldn't touch your papers!" she would say. The old man would be deeply embarrassed for a moment. "Of course—of course!" he would mutter, with the mysterious veils that shrouded his reason parting again. And he would go to bend his giant strength upon the job of cleaning the yard, or beating rugs, in a very fury of shame and penitence that he had mistaken his darling Rose for a stranger, even for an instant.

To-night Grandpa was happily outlining a plan to buy a large tract in River Street from some person unknown, named "Injun Jim." "That'll mean that we own what's practically the heart of the town," he said, triumphantly. "Sure we will!" Ned assured him, cheerfully.

Rosalind wasted no comments upon what was the usual home atmosphere. She was not critical. Her buoyant disposition, her ambition and imagination, her capacity for making friends, her health, youth, and beauty, were her unconscious armour against depression or criticism.

She went upstairs. Cecilia hadn't made the beds! —No matter, Rosalind was quite accustomed to

smoothing her sheets only three minutes before she collapsed into them. If the downstairs rooms were shabby, the upstairs ones were beyond all hope. A sort of twilight gloom was dispersed among them, among the walnut beds and dim mirrors and slinky curtains. Rosalind realized that the question of summer-time ventilation had not yet impressed itself upon her mother, and flung up several windows, saying, "For heavens' sake!" under her breath as she did so.

Her clothing was rapidly changed, and she ran downstairs again in the thin cotton kimono and instantly busied herself with soap flakes and hot water. The perspiration came out upon her forehead as she worked; when her mother announced dinner, she was busily pressing a linen skirt and urged the others to commence without her.

But she was presently among them, only playing with the heavy food, but pleased to find a chilled sago custard added to the menu.

"Mom, this is delicious. Say, listen, Grandpa! I was in the Library at noon to-day, and Miss Gately was showing me all of your old books—lots of them with your name written in them."

"Oh, my, yes! I suppose he gave the town thousands and thousands of dollars' worth of books," Mrs. Kirby said, wearily proud. "Eat your dinner, Papa," she added, for the old man and Audrey were chuckling and whispering together like two children.

"The Encyclopædias," Rosalind supplied, encouragingly, as her grandfather looked at her vaguely.

"I've got to get up there and have a talk with Miss Gately," said Mrs. Kirby. "I haven't been in the Library for years."

"The fourth volume, 'Cod-Dem,' is gone, Mom," Rosalind further contributed. "It's never been there."

"Cod dem it!" said Ned, with a roar of youthful laughter.

"Mom, do you think he ought to say things like that?" Cecily complained, smoothly. "Do you think he and the Bowdish boy ought to follow Agnes Parrott and I around the way he does and call us names? He calls us terrible names. And he wasn't in school last Friday afternoon, either; he said he was sick, just because he *hoped*," continued Cecily, with a vicious look for her brother, "that by Monday Miss Mott would have forgotten to speak about it!"

"*Brother*——" Mrs. Kirby began patiently.

"That volume of the Encyclopædia, now," said the old man, unexpectedly, "that was in my office, time all River Street burned up. Yessir, I had that volume there. I's working up some business at the time," he went on importantly, "and s'I—s'I—'I'll make sure of what I'm doing!' I was lookin' up law—that's what I was doing. Roe Jackson was right there in my office. I had real handsome offices, with my name on the door——"

"Eat your pudding, Papa," Mrs. Kirby said, as he paused. "I remember those offices, with Papa's name on the door," she added, in a tone of mild melancholy. "Now, don't you do that, darling. Aren't you going out with Jack?" she questioned, as Rosalind began to pile spoons and scrape plates.

"Yes'm. But it's only twenty past seven." Rosalind's heart brimmed with joy at the mere reminder of the always amazing fact. She went into the kitchen with her eyes shining like stars.

Why, only this time last year she had been eternally sifting facts, worrying, persuading herself now that of course Jack Talbot, the richest and the most popular boy in the village, wouldn't look at her, and then veering to the other point of view, and frightening herself with the indisputable evidence that he cared—was beginning to care.

And then had come the three consecutive evenings of the church bazaar at Thanksgiving, a golden time always to shine in Rosalind's memory with a glory not of earth. Ah, wasn't it enough felicity to be twenty, and not ugly, and popular, and a good dancer? Wasn't it enough to have a new dress, white lace and pink, pink ribbons, put together by Miss Sally Towsey just for this occasion?

How full to running over had been Rosalind Kirby's cup when Jack Talbot not only came to the dance, but came there unquestionably to see her, to dance with her, to flatter her, to remain by her side until all Gates Mill was talking. And presently the compliments, the presents, the unequivocal speeches had followed each other so thick and fast that Rosalind could hardly tabulate them, hardly analyze them.

She had mounted straight from earth to heaven. She had never been despondent, she had always felt that somehow she and Mom and Cecily and Audrey and Ned and Grandpa would work out their problem, would gradually rise from poverty to comfort, and comfort to something more. The time was coming when life would not be all shabbiness and bills and self-denials and fatigue and worry.

But to have half the battle won at a single blow—to have Jack Talbot step so unexpectedly into her af-

fairs, with the Talbot fortune and the Talbot name and position looming in the background, was truly to be chosen from the ranks, for honours and distinctions undreamed. Rosalind was not calculating, not mercenary and material in her ambitions, but her joy in being this splendid man's choice was not entirely uncoloured by these considerations.

The Kirbys had been snubbed, they had been ignored and despised and pitied for all of Rosalind's lifetime. Parties at which her mother's daughter should have been an honoured guest went on brilliantly without Rosalind. Life brimmed with humiliations and inhibitions for them all. Certain doors were closed, certain eyes were turned away, certain old obligations were forgotten when the Kirbys came by.

Rosalind had asked the world no favours; it is doubtful if the full measure of her privations, of her exact position, indeed, had ever fully dawned on her. But her sudden restoration to favour now, when Jack Talbot's car brought her home to shabby Old Mill Lane day after day, brought exquisite balm and solace to her soul. As his wife, she would hold a position second to no young woman in Gates Mill. She might live in one of the simple little new bungalows out Moncada Way, or in the Vernon Heights Manor development, all green blinds and pink Spanish plaster; she might do her own housework if she saw fit; they might sell the gray car. But she would still be the most important young matron in town.

But these thoughts, if they came to her at all, came somewhat confusedly, and always with secondary importance. Rosalind was loyally a Kirby, and it was delightful to her to think of making her family proud,

of being able to help them, and of standing to Cecily for what was not only good and simple and true, but what was also a supremely successful philosophy. Cecily was inclined to be a little bold, somewhat independent; she worried her mother and sister with her defiant stubbornness. But with a married sister, and the home of the Jack Talbots to go to, Cecily would change.

But, first and last and always, primarily and fundamentally, Rosalind, who had never been in love before, was deeply and truly in love. She told Jack, and truthfully, that if every reason in the world had been against her loving him, she must still have given him her whole heart, every wish and thought and hope and prayer of her life.

She had taken love before; she had never given it. The difference amused and astonished her. In the first few days of their rapidly developing affair the symptoms had almost alarmed her.

To find herself always breathless, always absent-minded, except for the comparatively brief times of their being together, always conscious of him, whether she was brushing her hair or adding a column of dry figures in his father's office, to find the world grown oddly thrilling, everything significant, and herself eternally dreaming, eternally hearing his voice, always thirsty and never hungry, was a new experience to Rosalind.

She saw her blue eyes gleam with a new and liquid light, in her blotched mirror; she saw the flaming colour in her cheeks; she saw her beauty deepen and accentuate and glow with a new charm; she was giddy with felicity, answered absently and yet tenderly when her mother spoke to her; she played with her food, emptied her glass again and again.

Every telephone meant his voice, every big lean figure downtown might be Jack. He might come into the office late; she lingered there. He might be in Crosset's, having ice cream; no harm in going in. She might be missing him if she stayed at home; she might miss him if she went to church with Mom—to the movies with Cecily and Ned. He was her world.

Well, this in the beginning. But they had been engaged for five months now, and if none of the joy and glory had worn off the fact, some of the novelty and astonishment had, or perhaps they had merely been replaced by the necessary things that creep into every human relationship. She and Jack were happier, they agreed, every time they met. But there were considerations.

For example, when had he better tell his mother? He was anxious, now, to have the whole world know, and Rosalind was delighted that he was anxious. In the beginning, for reasons she had forgotten, it had seemed good to both to keep the thing secret. But now Rosalind had taken her mother and Cecily into her confidence, and Jack had at last reached the point when he was a little impatient of further delay. If his mother wanted to fuss, he said hardily, let her fuss. People never married to please their mothers, anyway, and his Rose of the World would win her like a shot! Mother and Dad, Jack told Rose, ought to be glad enough to have him pick a respectable girl, that everybody in town knew and loved, and settle down.

Rosalind maintained a certain girlish dignity in the matter. She knew that Jack never intentionally hurt her; it was just that his mother's point of view seemed more important to him than it really was. Perhaps,

she mused, with a little developing gravity born of love and responsibility, perhaps she, Rosalind, was prejudiced, too, in favour of her own family. It was natural that Jack should take his mother's false standards seriously, even though he did not himself share them, natural that he should feel sorry that his girl did not come from the Heights neighbourhood, or dignified, sleepy old Harrison Street.

And it was equally natural that she, burdened from her actual little girlhood with poverty and worry and struggle, should feel herself still answerable for Grandpa's welfare, for Mom's and Ned's and Cecy's happiness. She had never taken it as a grievance, or even as a burden, but it had always been close to her heart, nevertheless. Rosalind had taken it courageously for granted that she was one of the girls born to play a man's part in her family, to be breadwinner and head to the forlorn little group, to eschew temporarily pretty gowns and happy times, until "things"—those mysterious "things" upon which half the world is waiting! —should change for the better.

In this prosperous, sun-flooded, peaceful Western community the economic struggle could never be too hard. There was not freezing, parching, poisoning, cramping, crowding out, to face. No sweatshop menaced Cecilia's young liberty, no slum swarming with dangers caught at Ned's feet. Cecy would drift contentedly enough into a job somewhere, out at Raynor's glove factory, or Terry's big flour mills, and Edith Rogers and Jack's cousin Juliet Barker would continue to call her "Cecy," in Grammar School fashion, and be called "Edie" and "Ju" in turn. Indeed, Edie and Ju would be extremely cordial to Cecy and Rosalind,

now, with this brilliant marriage once a fact accomplished.

Rosalind began to long for its accomplishment. There was such a tedious time of details to live through beforehand. When it was once over, with Jack's mother reconciled and placated, and perhaps even won, and Grandpa and Mom living on placidly under the new order, and all the dreaded social amenities, such as Mom meeting Jack's people, and Rosalind dining with the Rogerses and the Barkers, things of the past, the girl felt that a great relief would flood her soul.

Because, if Jack's mother was pretentious and unfriendly, her own mother was apt to be embarrassingly formal, too. Mrs. Kirby had talked elegantly of a dinner; the families of an engaged couple always gave dinners, it appeared. Rosalind could imagine that dinner, the slips and errors of the Japanese boy called in to serve, the gaslights hissing in their brackets, her mother mincingly social; Grandpa where? Ned where? Audrey where?

Sometimes she longed just to slip down to the City Hall with Jack and walk the three blocks to St. Mary's, license in hand, and be married. Rosalind would lie awake in the sweet spring night, planning the little costume for the occasion. Her blue swiss with the red dots, her blue straw hat with the red roses, her tan pumps—she must get a pair of the eighty-nine-cent silk stockings at Bond's——

CHAPTER III

To-night she wore the blue swiss and the rose-covered hat, and Cleopatra herself might have turned to look at her, when Rosalind Kirby came with Jack Talbot and her little sister Cecilia into the barnlike space that was called the Grand Opera House.

Cecilia was with them because she had come coaxingly upstairs to the hot, poorly lighted bedroom where Rosalind was making herself a vision of beauty, and had begged to be included.

"Listen, Sis. Dory Barker has my ticket, and he's going to wait at the door. But Mom won't let me go with Dory; she says I'm too young. Sis, *please!*"

"I don't think you ought to let a boy buy you your ticket, Cecy," Rosalind had said, mildly.

"He isn't a boy, he's twenty-four," Cecy had argued, sulkily, chewing the silk fringe on the tassel of Rosalind's fan.

"Please stop chewing that. But Mom doesn't like your going with boys at all, Cecy, while you're only in High," Rosalind had resumed, pushing the hat down against the golden fluff carefully.

"But I'd be with you and Jack——"

"Yes, I know." Rosalind hesitated. She hated always to drag in the family.

But she was a good sister, a conscientious sister, always trying to supply to these defrauded children what their distinguished grandfather and good father might

have given them. Cecy and Ned and Audrey must have happiness, must have opportunities, must have friends.

And while she had mused, Cecy had quite disarmed her by saying innocently:

"If you want to drive 'round with Jack first, Sis, I'll walk to the Opera House alone, or if Mom doesn't like that, I'll have Grandpa walk there with me."

Rosalind had burst out into a laugh, and running to the head of the back stairs had shouted down to the kitchen region:

"Mom, can Jack and I take Cecy to-night?"

So Cecilia was at the concert, radiant in an old gown of Rosalind's that had been dyed a not-too-successful watermelon pink, and Cecilia's dark little face was glowing with delight. She was a small, gipsyish type, with freckles on an olive-brown skin, and tangled curly bobbed hair, and had a certain piquant beauty of her own. But Cecy always spoke of herself as a wop and a monkey and a nig, and saved all her vanity for pride in her glorious sister.

All Gates Mill was at the concert to-night. By eight o'clock the front rows of chairs were filled with wriggling and twisting and chewing and squirming and laughing and whispering and cat-calling little boys, who edged any adult or girl firmly from their ranks, but who occasionally admitted a giggling confederate to their midst, pushing along to make room for him and adding his sodden cap to the heap under their chairs.

Back of them came a row of foresighted, middle-aged, plain, big stout women, and men with well-shaven, sunburned faces, who had planned an early dinner and an early start, and who were here, in good seats, de-

termined to miss nothing. And back of them again came whispering young persons, bending over laps to talk down rows of five and six, passing candy, giggling, murmuring, twisting about to see who was filtering in from the back. Here, too, were husbands and wives, with an occasional baby in arms, and little girls with stringy curls who stood up and turned about to watch the aisle, and two Chinese from the factory neighbourhood, where there was a Chinese colony, and several Japanese, quiet, watching, and with their small American-dressed wives, who looked like clumsy little dolls in their duck skirts and silk waists.

And then, of course, there were the town personalities: Mayor Rudolph with his married daughters and sons, stout, panting, good-natured Teutonic types, and Doc Newman, to whom more than one householder called a "Hello, Doc!" and Father Brady, consulting his big watch, because this was the night that he had to take the ten-ten every month, to spend a day in the prison thirty miles away, and old Judge Raymond, and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Rogers of the Bank, with young Fred and his wife, who had been Amy Pearsall, and the Terrys from the big flour mill. And of course the Talbots were there, bored but dutiful; Rosalind thought disrespectfully that her prospective mother-in-law always treated the people of Gates Mill as if she were the lady of the manor, and they tenantry at the most, if not actual serfs.

"Lawsy, how she would love to send slaves to the whipping-house!" Rosalind had said once to Cecy. But that was long ago; duty entered into the matter now, and Rosalind was prepared to do the correct thing.

"Do you think I ought to go up to your mother after-

ward and just say something?" she asked now, when Jack and she were seated and could speak to each other unheard.

"She won't stay for the dance, she and my father'll beat it before the last number," Jack whispered back.

"Then do you think I'd better go and speak to her in the intermission?" Rosalind pursued, conscientiously.

"Well, she's with the Rogerses and Aunt May. It might—she mightn't like it," Jack decided, after a moment's worried consideration. Rosalind felt a twinge, a little prickle of the skin. But no matter, the facts remained the facts, and Mrs. Talbot's liking them or not liking them was of no real importance.

Later, when the dance had thinned and the moon was shining brightly upon a radiation of small motor cars and sauntering couples leaving the scene of gaiety for the neighbouring villages, scattered cottages and the isolated farms, Rosalind and Jack had a few minutes of serious talk. The girl could have danced all night, but there was Cecy and the early start for the Iron Works to-morrow to think of, and it was only midnight when she came down to the gray car with Jack, settled herself in it to wait for her sister, who was being hilariously tagged by half the youths in town, upstairs, and said suddenly and irrelevantly:

"The thing is, Jack, there's some attitude a girl ought to take about her husband's mother—there's *something* I ought to do. But I don't know what! And I can't ask Mom, because she immediately becomes pompous and says that we ought to have a reception, and fruit punch, and all that rubbish."

"I can't ask *my* mother," Jack offered, perplexed.

"No, of course not. How does this strike you,

Jack?" Rosalind mused. "Suppose that on some Sunday afternoon, at about four, you come for me and we call on your mother? How would that do? That seems to me the wisest thing. We needn't necessarily say anything about getting married, but I *could* say—if I got a good chance—something about our plans, just as a sort of aside, maybe. Doesn't that seem to you more dignified than to have everyone talking about it, and my own people knowing it, and your mother taking no notice at all?"

"Yep," Jack agreed, after a slight pause. "I guess that'd be a good thing to do. They can't say then that we slipped anything over on them."

"We might just sort of saunter in some Sunday, Jack, as if we had been taking a walk," the girl suggested further.

"I think that'd be even better——" He bunched her soft fingers against his lips, and kissed them. "Do you love me, Rose of the World?" he asked.

Except for the Terry Flour Mills, which were, in the estimate of Gates Mill, successful almost to the point of being vulgar, the Talbot Iron Works were the most important element in the business life of the town. They were familiarly known as "the Works," and they had a sentimental as well as commercial value.

Terry was a San Franciscan, a rich man before he had ever established himself here, a comparative newcomer, dating from about the year of McKinley's assassination. He was responsible for the introduction of foreign labour, he was an outsider. But the Talbots had made every penny of their fortune in Gates Mill—had, as their official letterheads modestly claimed, "put Gates

Mill on the map," and their employees were the people of Gates Mill, the native born.

The famous "Centipede," the little steam tractor that was to-day pulling half the cultivators and ploughs and harrows over the fertile fields of the Golden State, was a product of Talbot's Works. Timidly launched a generation ago, when the actual cultivation of these same fields was in its infancy, it had been growing steadily in favour, and there was no sight the loyal citizens of Gates Mill liked so well as the sight of flat-cars loaded with the neatly crated "Centipedes," bound for Portland and Los Angeles, Seattle and Virginia City.

The Talbot Iron Works produced other things, it is true. But it was the famous little "Centipede" that had built the Talbot Building in River Street, that had established the Talbot Mansion in the Upper River district, that was even mentioned in the motor-tire advertisement that was the first thing to catch the eyes of all who approached Gates Mill by the county road.

"Gates Mill, five miles," read the big opened book of history represented by the sign, "home of the Talbot 'Centipede' Tractor, which furnishes motive power to thousands of California ranches."

The Iron Works themselves were the usual insignificant jumble of low wooden roofs, panting furnaces, odd fences and sheds, and one respectable cement building, standing four-square in the confusion, with six tall chimneys belching heavy smoke over the King Street district, across the river. Rosalind had only to turn from the southern end of Old Mill Lane, skirt the raw cliffs of the old quarry, above which lay respectable Vernon Heights, and the old Bainbridge house among

its trees, and follow the sagging Dover Street bridge for some hundred yards, to be at her employer's office. The Terry Mills, great white-painted roofs and walls, were but a quarter-mile beyond. Everything concerning the Terry's was as white as everything touching the Iron Works was black. The great vans from the flour mills were white, the workers there, men and women, were dressed in white and powdered with white, and it was a source of continual grievance at the Iron Works that their best clerks and hands were continually finding the bigness and modernness and cleanliness of the flour mills attractive.

"You can't keep an iron foundry looking like a toy bakery!" old J. Wittinger would growl, scrubbing and sousing himself in the spotless bathroom next to his airy big bedroom in the Upper River Street house.

"I think these all-glass factories are ridiculous!" his wife would declare, soothingly. Mrs. Talbot never went near the Iron Works; she had no time for it. She was a woman who loved her own home, her wardrobe, her beautifully appointed table. She enjoyed the reputation of being the most fastidious housekeeper in town, of knowing what was new in canapés, in glassware, in handkerchiefs, and in salad-dressings. She was a leader in her club, in her circle, and she liked the rôle.

Born and bred in a small town, with no standard by which to judge except the small-town standards, Rosalind had always found Harrison Street and Upper River Street a fairyland without whose portals all but the most blessed of human beings must stop. Since her very babyhood she had loved to walk in that direction on the hot, silent Sunday afternoons of summer, or in the friendly autumn dusk, to catch such

glimpses as the passer might of white-gravelled drives, big stables and garages under big trees, and just the bit of shining awninged windows or screened side porch that the shrubs and roses and the curves of the garden paths permitted.

There was a sleepy peace about it all, in summer, peace only accentuated by the click of horses' hoofs in the old surrey, or the shouts of youngsters on the tennis ground. And in late October, when thinning foliage everywhere showed unexpected vistas, Rosalind sometimes walked home three blocks out of her way to come by the Harrison Street bridge and see the lights go up in Judge Raymond's old white wooden mansion with its columns and porches, and to see Amy Rogers drive in to visit her mother in the big shingled brown Pearsall house, and to hear the four Terry children shouting as they drove their pony-cart up the big, chain-guarded roadway between the geraniums and the hydrangeas.

Now, nervous and pale and resolutely composed, she was calling here in Harrison Street as Jack Talbot's promised wife, sitting on the side porch with her old employer, and with Jack's mother, daintily dressed, superficially merry Mrs. Talbot, who *would* keep the conversation general and unimportant, and Mrs. Rogers, fat and homely, with the smaller Rogers' girl and boy with her, obviously eager to escape from this atmosphere that to Rosalind was so sacred. And she, Rosalind Kirby, would be a part of it some day, free to walk over these lawns, and to go up from these airy lower floors with their rugs and books and flowers, to the bedrooms and the attics: she would know the servants' names, and they would call her "Mrs. Jack"——

"Ev' been to New York?" Mrs. Rogers asked her suddenly.

"Oh, no. I'm a strictly local product, like the famous 'Centipede'!" Rosalind answered, with a little laugh. But nobody else laughed. Jack's kind mouth twitched with a sympathetic grin, but she knew he felt nervous and constrained, and from her employer's expression she realized that she had somehow offended old "Writing Tablet," as his employees sometimes called J. Wittinger Talbot, president of the Works.

"My daughter Edie—she's just finished at Benchley's School in New York," Mrs. Rogers continued, unseeing. "I guess she'll visit some before she comes home. Father's afraid Gates Mill won't look any too good to her—she looks real grown up in her pictures."

"She's a little duchess," Mrs. Talbot said, affectionately. "Mr. Talbot and I made a special run out to the school one Sunday—when was it, Wittinger?—one Sunday in October, when we were in New York, anyway. And she's a perfect little darling! Do you remember buying her the Easter egg with the cunning little bunny and the carrots inside, Jackie?"

"I was about eight," Jack responded, gruffly, with a glance at Rosalind, "and she was just born!"

"I didn't say how old you were, dear—what a tone to use to your mother! But you were fifteen when you told me that you thought if *I* asked Edith to go with you to Amy's party, she'd go——"

"She was seven, then, and a darned cute kid—cuter than you'll ever be, Dorothy," Jack said to Edith's little sister. Dorothy made a hideous face; she was hot and resentful and bored.

"You're going to have tea, Eva?" said Jack's mother

to Mrs. Rogers. "And how do you have yours, Miss Kirby? Wittinger, push that little table near to Miss Kirby. Thank you, dear. Jackie—Jackie, what a mouthful! I hope you scold my boy for his terrible manners, Miss Kirby—I know you have a great influence over him. Poor Jack, ever since he was in long trousers some wonderful girl—the most wonderful girl in the world, of course—has had a great deal more influence with him than his mother. But he does love her, too, doesn't he?" finished Mrs. Talbot, throwing her pretty head back so that it rested against his chest as he bent over from behind her with the plate of sandwiches. Their faces were close together. "Kiss me, you naughty boy!" she said.

Jack kissed her. She had always been a spoiled child, always admired and happy and satisfied and praised and courted; she had been a Miss Beebe, of Sacramento, a belle, an heiress—everything. Sometimes when Rosalind tried with youthful philosophy to establish a law of averages, to convince herself that everybody had some sorrow and everybody some joy, she found it hard to reconcile her theory to the forty-five cloudless years of Lila Beebe Talbot's life.

Presently the call was over, and she and Jack were sauntering through the wide leafy streets toward Old Mill Lane. Late June was now in full tide, for Rosalind had postponed this hour apprehensively more than once. All sorts of persons were walking abroad in the late sweet Sunday afternoon, and as her hot cheeks cooled and her heart quieted down, the girl had time to reflect that this call, most unsatisfactory to her loving and hungry heart, was from a purely social standpoint, nevertheless, a long step toward her official position as

Jack's wife. She thought with pleasure that all these people would identify her, and identify Jack, and suspect what their errand had been in this aristocratic neighbourhood.

Her mood was all harmony when they struck in behind the Rodriguez barn and walked up a crooked little lane that was almost roofed with sweet old overgrown garden bushes, lilacs and pussywillows and roses. Toppling old wooden fences, supporting honeysuckle and Dorothy Perkins and smothered in fuchsias and yellow flowering broom, turned this lane into a tunnel of greenness and fragrance. There was a broken gate, presently, that gave upon the Kirby backyard, but before they reached the gate Jack put his arm about the slim figure in the blue swiss, and Rosalind leaned against his shoulder, and their steps slackened—almost stopped.

"Do you love me, dear?" he asked then, again.

She looked up at him earnestly, holding his eager arms at a little distance, her blue eyes travelling thoughtfully over his handsome face as if she were thinking only of his question, and not at all of the living man who asked it.

"Ah, Jack—what else could I do!" she breathed then, half-smiling.

Across the warm apricot colour of her smooth cheek a soft wandering breeze had driven a little straying feather of her burned-gold hair; her eyes were darkened with the unusually serious emotions of the afternoon, and there was something new about her beautiful, sensitive mouth, something disciplined, womanly, something that did not seem quite to belong to the dancing, laughing, irresponsible village beauty he had won just

a few months ago. Jack was suddenly oddly touched, suddenly impressed with the type of woman she was some day to be, earnest, sweet, impressionable—above all, touchingly, almost alarmingly "good."

He thought of that word for her as he took her into his arms, and in that moment there came to them both a strange feeling of surprise in themselves, and love, and life. Jack Talbot, going to be married to the Kirby girl! Rose Kirby's flirting and speculating done—and Rose Mrs. Jack Talbot! Married!

"We'll—I guess we'll be married, Rose," Jack said, awkwardly, with a sort of abashed amusement. "We didn't think of a house—and Sunday dinners with my people—and children, and all that, the night I cut in on Walt Porter, did we?"

"No," Rosalind said, softly, blue eyes on his face.

"My wife——" he whispered into the rioting hair from which her rose-crowned hat had slipped.

She looked up at him, looked down, looked back again, and he saw—and thrilled to see—her quick breath move the white breast where the blue swiss opened with a snowy frill.

"My husband!" she said, under her breath. And Jack saw the sudden mist of tears in the eyes she hid against his shoulder. Rose stayed so, a moment, with her smooth, flushed cheek against the rough homespun. "I—I love you too much, dear!" she said then, looking up with an April face.

And in another second, with something like shame, laughter, and a sort of shy pride mingled in her look, she had opened the vine-wreathed old door in the fence, and was gone.

Jack watched it for a few minutes, standing just as

she had left him; his head a little lowered, his breath coming a little fast, his eyes never moving from the spot where she had disappeared.

The seconds went by in such a stillness that he could hear the ticking of his wrist watch and the sleepy twilight clucking of the Kirby chicken yard on the other side of the fence. The sweet afternoon light seemed to be curiously warm, clear, enchanted; there was no movement among the dappled tree shadows of the lane. Far off in River Street he could hear an occasional mellow motor horn.

She would certainly come back, he had said to himself. But she did not come back. And gradually the expectant look faded from the boy's eyes, and a graver expression came there, something almost of reverence.

She had not been flirting with him, teasing him. She really loved him, his little Rose of the World. Now the shabby old house, and the family's selfish needs had absorbed her, but presently he would lift her out of all that.

Jack walked slowly home, his hands plunged into his pockets. And in his ears he seemed still to hear the echoes of her thrilling sweet voice, saying, "My husband!"

CHAPTER IV

Rose, by the mere force of circumstances, had remembered the golden few minutes in the lane less long. She had had to put the thought of them away, with her best dress and hat, for use again when her thoughts or her time were free.

Now she was instantly engulfed in household responsibilities. Cecy came hopping upstairs after her, full of grievances. Her mother hoped, rather forlornly, that she had had some delicious things to eat at the Talbots, because she was just having a pick-up supper, at home. The pick-up supper appeared to be principally composed of watery canned tomatoes, hardly heated through, and coffee-cake from the bakery.

Rose, however, grated crumbs and put a half-bowl of cold gelatinous stew into the tomatoes, made quantities of weak but well-sweetened cocoa, and, because the Talbots had talked about cinnamon toast, essayed her first cinnamon toast. So that the supper was a great success, and only spoiled for her healthy young appetite because she had not asked Jack to stay for it.

Somehow, when she didn't ask Jack to stay, an impromptu meal like this was apt to prove plentiful and delicious. But when she did, there seemed to be an evil spell over the little spontaneous hospitality. Whichever way she chose she was sure to regret.

And this was just one more uncomfortable feature in the position of a poor girl engaged to a rich man. If

Rose had been engaged to Clem Parrott, for example, or one of the Bridger boys, she would have had no misgivings. She might have brought him in, laughing and unembarrassed, to set him toasting bread, or to send him down to the bakery for another loaf, quite without self-consciousness. A spotted tablecloth, crumbs and wrinkles, disorder and informality would mean nothing to a Parrott or a Bridger.

But to a Talbot! mused Rose, hanging out of her bedroom window, and drinking in the sweet coolness and dark of the night, a few hours later. To a Talbot, fresh from those pleasant big airy rooms, and those respectful servants, and those damp delicious little cucumber and cream-cheese sandwiches! Unthinkable.

Besides, there was the financial consideration. Eggs cost money. Jam cost money. Coffee had to have cream, and cream was expensive. The Kirbys rarely had eggs, cream, and jam at one meal. As for cold meat, to be sliced impromptu from the joint, and odds and ends of cheeses and salads and rolls—they simply were not there.

Besides that, darling old Grandpa was always roaming about, talking about papers and contracts and as pleased as a child with an unexpectedly appetizing meal. Then there were Cecilia and Audrey, both critical and always underfoot, and even if Mom considerately went over to the Renfrews' or the Cudworths', Ned was almost sure to turn up, ravenous, and brutally oblivious to any sisterly hints that the entire omelette hadn't been made for his express satisfaction.

But how she would stuff these beloved juniors when every pound of coffee and butter and every loaf of bread wasn't a separate consideration! She would go into Hellman's Grocery, and order sardines by the

dozen cans, and cheese by the pound, and have whole new tin boxes of crackers always waiting upon her pantry shelf. Dark blue bungalow aprons—blue bowls for soups——

Rosalind fell to musing, and she felt in her thankful heart that none of life's problems in the years to come could be so hard as those she would triumphantly solve upon the day she became Jack's wife.

She had always anticipated marriage, every girl did. But that it would smooth her path so gloriously was beyond her most optimistic dreams. Her thoughts went pitifully back across the years to-night, and she felt for her struggling, bewildered, gallant little old self a tenderness almost maternal.

What was she—Rosalind Kirby? What was identity, entity, after all? What was this breathing, dreaming, reminiscent scrap of flesh and blood that called itself Rosalind Kirby?

The world was beginning to say that she was a wonderful sister, a wonderful daughter, that that eldest girl of poor Joe Kirby's had held the whole family together, had shouldered the whole load.

Rosalind was proud of the reputation, and she was the better daughter, and the better sister, because of it. But in an occasional honest mood, in such a "good" mood as she found herself to-night, she appreciated that the praise had made the fact, rather than the fact won the praise. She hadn't thought especially about her duty when poor Daddy died. Or had she?

Had she been just a shade more conscientious than the average high-school girl? Had she been a little more loving with Cecilia than most sixteen-year-old girls were with small sisters?

Her father had left everything to her, and Rosalind sometimes confessed in her secret heart that she had been mournfully proud to be a golden-headed half-orphan. Subdued voices all around her had murmured that Rose was wonderful—that poor Mrs. Kirby had broken down, the smaller children were no help at all, and that Cecy had simply had selfish hysterics all over the place.

If she had been inclined to hysterics and selfishness herself, Rose mused, wouldn't those low voices have given her her cue? Had they had their share in making her the wonderful, controlled, courageous personality she had so immediately become? Golden-haired, in fresh, simple black, she had taken her place among the employees of the Talbot Iron Works, and the voices through all these years had gone on whispering: that was Rose Kirby, practically supporting her mother and younger brothers and sisters and her poor old half-witted grandfather, and so wonderfully gay and popular with it all, and so crazy about her own people! Why, she wouldn't take a piece of candy without carrying it home to share with them.

Well, after all, did it matter by what unworthy means one became loving, serving, one became patient and womanly and good, so long as that end was reached? If Rose had found—and she thought she had—that life is sweet to the gentle daughter, the patient sister, the girl who resolutely makes herself the mainstay and sunshine of those she loves, was it of any consequence that sometimes the love and service had been only the part that she played bravely and steadily in the face of overwhelming odds?

It would no longer be a part, resolved the girl who

dreamed in the window above Old Mill Lane and watched the heavy branches of the maples move in the waning moonlight. No, she would be, now, what she had so long seemed, and tried, to be.

Love was her pass-key, her talisman, her secret. She would grow to be the gentlest, the truest, the best and kindest woman in the town; she would patiently, tenderly guide and hold Cecy; she would have dear old tumble-headed, impulsive Ned for her squire—help him to grow to be something like Jack——

Jack! Her thoughts wandered at the name, and she thought of the long day, of the tea hour in the sacred precincts of Upper River Street, of that farewell in the lane. Somehow to-day had marked a new milestone in their relationship; there in the lane the great thought had come to them for the first time, after these months, when they had so casually played with the words. Husband and wife. Husband and wife.

"I asked him how I could help loving him," Rosalind dreamed. "I wonder if he knows what he seems like—to a girl——"

He was handsome—big and clean and straight—but it was not that. And then he was clever, bewilderingly at home with dozens of things that merely dazzled Rosalind: plays and books, tennis and golf, swimming and bridge. He knew all these things, tossed off allusions to them in his talk. Then his big hands, his quick grin, the tones of his authoritative voice, the faint fragrance his fine linen diffused, his position as son and heir at the Works, all these lent him personality and charm.

But there was more. He was generous and affectionate, he was just the right shade jealous, and there was

something about the masterful glint in his gray eyes—something, for example, about the lordly way in which he had ordered luncheon up at Glen Springs that noonday——

"Well, I guess I am just in love with him," Rose summarized, thinking on these things. There was never a look or a word or a motion that did not seem to her poignantly significant.

And then, in conclusion, what tenderness, gaiety, and charm he could show the woman he loved! She had an odd heartache, even now, remembering the very beginnings of it—the first murmured words and the first kiss.

He kissed her now whenever they met unobserved, and often when they sat out on the steps in the warm spring nights. But there had been something strangely sweet, something never repeated, about that first kiss. It had not frightened her. But of late, once or twice, he had kissed her until he frightened her——

And once or twice there had been words that frightened her a little, too. But after all, it was a happy sort of fear, with the knowledge behind it that no matter what the years ahead were to bring her, this dear and fearless and protecting figure would be by her side.

"Come—to—bed!" half-yawned and half-shouted Cecy, a roused figure in the dim shadowy oblong that was the bed.

Rosalind yawned, shuddered, and got stiffly to her feet.

"Why you want to hang out there getting your death and making yourself as homely as venial sin——" Cecy grumbled.

Rosalind was rapidly undressing in the dark, groping for the crêpe nightgown with the draggled pink ribbon. "Cecy, dearest, I'm too happy to sleep!" she protested, sinking down on her knees automatically for a prayer that would be half a dream.

Jack had remembered the poignantly sweet ten minutes in the lane, too, as he walked homeward. But once there, he had found matters afoot to engage his attention. His mother had called him into her dressing room as he leaped up three stairs at a stride.

"Jackie-boy! Going to dress for dinner?"

"Not unless I must." He came in, sat down near her, and began to play with her dressing-table bottles and jars.

"Mrs. Rogers had a telegram five minutes after you left, dear. And who do you suppose is coming home to-morrow?"

"Edith," Jack guessed, polite and bored.

"Edith! Isn't that lovely? And you must go and see her at once, ducky, because she was your little girl sweetheart."

"Mamma, for heavens' sake! She's—what? Eighteen?"

"Eighteen. The age I was when I was married. What a child I was!"

"How'd you like Rosalind this afternoon?" Jack asked, suddenly.

Mrs. Talbot's expression slightly congealed, and her bright brown eyes hardened.

"Why, my dear, I've seen her fifty times before! Why should I think her any different from what she's always been? She's a nice, friendly little creature—I

don't mean a flapper, exactly, but just like a thousand other girls. Now you look cross at Mamma, but what can I say, Jack?" his mother broke off to ask appealingly. "All that Kirby and Tallifer crowd are pretty, and she's extremely pretty. I thought she seemed nervous——"

"I guess she was, poor kid," said Jack, with his heart warming suddenly to the mere thought of her.

"I thought it rather an odd thing to do," his mother said, mildly, faintly stressing the last word.

"What?" Jack asked, quickly, flushing.

"Why—come in here to tea, uninvited. Some girls —Edith, for example, wouldn't have done that," explained Mrs. Talbot.

"Well, but—my God, Mamma, I'm going to marry her! I told you that! I said——"

"Kindly don't swear, dear. In the first place, you said nothing of the kind," the woman said, flushing and annoyed in her turn. "You said that you were engaged to her, or had an understanding with her—that's a very different thing. She's extremely young; you'll both have half-a-dozen affairs before you settle down. Everyone does. You've been in love before, and you've been engaged before——"

"Who to?" Jack demanded, belligerently.

"Well, to Amy Pearsall——"

"Mamma, for the Lord's sake! I had a case on Amy before I went to college. She was about fifteen and I seventeen! That was ten years ago."

"You asked your father if you could marry her, Jack."

"Oh, Lord!"

"And what about that beautiful Honor Lucas that all you boys were so mad about—in college——"

"Help!" Jack muttered, under his breath.

"Well, I know she wrote you, Jack, and said that you had come into her life, or something. I assure you that this affair will—or *may*—seem as unimportant as those in a few more years! I don't say it *will*," Mrs. Talbot rambled on comfortably, made beautiful for the evening now, and straightening her dresser, "and I don't say it won't. All I ask of you is not to commit yourself until you are a little more sure——"

"Unfortunately, it's a little late for this sort of advice," Jack interrupted, resentfully.

"Until you feel quite sure," his mother resumed, smoothly, "that you are ready to shoulder the fearful responsibility of having, not only your wife, but practically her entire family, upon your hands. I don't deny she's a nice girl—certainly she's exceptionally pretty. But prettiness isn't much in itself, Jack—almost all women are pretty when they're young. And this girl"—his mother never dignified her by name—"this girl really hasn't had a fair education, dear," she said, mildly regretful. "It hasn't been her fault—I know that. But I doubt if she finished High School. No languages, no travel, no literary classes or music—those are serious things, dear. The sister is a detestable little thing—I watched her the other evening—a perfect hoyden. This one seems a very nice girl, only—only—is she going to be the sort of woman, dear, my boy wants to live with? It's for you to decide whether she would keep step with you—whether the time mightn't come when you would wish she had been one of—ourselves."

"*Rosalind!*" Jack said, loyal, amused, impatient, tender, all at once. "You don't know my girl!"

CHAPTER V

THE next afternoon, when Rosalind was still busy with the old ledgers and files in the Iron Works, Jack's father asked him to drive him home at half-past four. Jack had hoped for some tennis with Bozzy Terry, but his mother, perhaps impressed by the youthful vigour and charm of the whole young person when he emerged from his room, after a shower, in clean linen, and with his yellow hair sleek and damp, had begged him please—just to please Mamma—to run over and see if Edith wasn't at home.

"She probably isn't, ducky. But if you don't go now you ought to go to-night, you know. They're all dining here to-morrow night, so it'll be awkward if you haven't made any move."

Edith wasn't at home. Or rather, she wasn't in the house. She had been out riding with Mrs. Fred, and the coloured maid 'spected they was out wid the dawgs, round past the garrardge, Mist' Jack, Portelia added. Jack crossed a drive and cut down through orange trees that were at once blossoming and bearing, and skirted the familiar grape arbour, where the latest-born Rogers was staring at him owl-eyed while she smeared her face with her evening meal, and so came upon the old stable, raked and swept and ordered, and the comparatively new garage, and odd fences of whitewashed pickets and green-posted wires, and a pony corral, where a little creamy-maned Shetland was tossing his plumed

head up and down, and where a girl in white linen was feeding a bay horse something that he mouthed from her confidently upheld palm.

The descending sunlight streamed through heavy tree foliage upon the whole scene; the fences cast long shadows upon mellow lawn, a collie came leaping toward Jack, barked, curvetted, and fawned upon him ingratiatingly.

"Well, Cæsar—you don't know me!" he reproached the animal, tumbling the beautiful feathered head between his big palms.

The girl turned quickly, gave him a frank look from brown eyes, and said laughingly:

"Cæsar does know you, apparently. But I confess I don't! Am I being horribly stupid? I've only got my left," she added, easily, extending a friendly hand. "My other hand's all sugary!"

"No, you're not being stupid," Jack answered, laughing himself. "And aren't all girls sugary—sugar and spice, and all that sort of thing?"

"Oh, look here——!" she protested, puzzled eyes still smiling at his. "Oh, it's Jack Talbot!" she exclaimed, in sudden relief. "Jack, how are you? And how nice of you! When I was so anxious to see you! But you've grown so big, and so hard, and so brown—and then I was such a little thing, you know, when we last saw each other! I was—let's see—fourteen. With a horrible gold band over my teeth! Do you remember saying I looked like a young wolverine? Oh, you laugh, but I cried myself to sleep over it!"

She did not look like a wolverine now, he assured her. She had a flat, boyish figure in the white linen riding suit, and the brim of her riding hat was becomingly

upturned. Her mouse-brown hair was fine and soft and straight, and brushed frankly away from a small-featured, intelligent little face; she had nice, long, boyish hands, and the big teeth had years ago fallen dutifully into a straight, shining alignment. She was easy to talk to, Jack told himself later. Her speech was charming, too. There was a sort of British crispness about it, nothing so affected as a broadened "a"—she didn't say "harff" any more than she said "haff"; she didn't quite say "gort" for "got," but the nice little phrase had been almost "I've gort only my left!"

Whatever she said, it was of course in his language. She had visited the Davenports in Maine last summer as he had three years ago. She played rotten bridge, she assured him, but her golf wasn't too awful; Bill Davenport had taken her on and taught her a lot.

"Isn't Bill a corker?" Jack had asked.

"Oh, Bill——!" Her slender shoulders had shrugged eloquently, and the fair, colourless skin had suddenly flushed.

They had loitered into the house, had dawdled at the piano. Had he heard this from the Follies? Had "Lightin'" been playing while he was in New York? No, that was later. They talked of New York while she fingered the piano keys.

"Mother, dear," she presently called casually, without stirring, as a footstep sounded in the hallway. "Just family dinner? I'm asking Jack!" And her mouse-brown eyebrows, slightly and whimsically raised above the smiling eyes she turned toward him, fitted the action to the word. "Surely—surely—surely," she conceded, negligently, when he mentioned an eight

o'clock engagement, "we won't keep you! But I haven't had as nice a talk as this in *years!*"

And she came to the doorway with him, at quarter to eight, her tiny coffee cup in her hand.

"We go up to Fallen Leaf in a few weeks, days, more's the pity!" she said, thoughtfully. "Does your mother still come up every year?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Then you will, too?"

"Oh, sure!"

"Ah," said Edith, contentedly, stirring with a tiny gold spoon, "that's all right, then." And suddenly, and in all neighbourly interest, she added: "Have you got a girl, Jack?"

"You know it!" he responded, grinning.

Afterward he remembered the nice look she gave him, the quick sisterly look of sympathy and pleasure.

"You'll tell me all about her? You know, I'm 'family', Jack. I've not forgotten that you gave me an Easter egg with a bunny in it when I was only six months old. I've got it yet—indeed I have! We'll have some wonderful talks at Fallen Leaf Lake."

Jack had to run for the roadster; he made Rosalind's house in something less than the record six minutes. But Rosalind was not even now quite ready; her mother had been delayed, it appeared, by Miss Sally Towsey's demands. Miss Sally, the seamstress by the day, was still there, lingering at the supper table. Cecy and Rose were desultorily finishing the dishes, but the older women were deep in talk around the partially cleared table. Old Man Tallifer had brought his strong-box down to the kitchen table, and was telling little Audrey about his oil stock. Audrey very good-naturedly helped

him straighten the worthless papers that were mixed with odd advertisements, pictures cut from magazines, old letters, strings and ribbons, rubber bands, clips, a yellow satin ribbon stamped "Reception Committee," and bundles of newspaper scraps. The little girl took a housewifely interest in ordering the jumble, as her mother and big sisters had all done a hundred times before her.

"Jack, do you like Clyde Bainbridge?" Rosalind asked, unexpectedly, when she had turned down the cuffs that were slightly spattered with dish water, and caught up her white sweater, and when she and Jack were skimming through the sweet, open countryside, straight into the face of an enormous, slowly rising orange moon.

"I don't know." Jack thought of his father's manager at the Works. "Pretty well," he said.

"I didn't think that you were crazy about him," Rosalind went on, animatedly. "I've always thought he was a little old-maidy—had to have everything just *so*. He's terribly dignified, I think. But anyway, he's been sort of hanging 'round the office nights when I would be finishing up. I just wondered. Is he going with anybody, do you think? You know he lives in that old place, just like his uncle did, and Minnie Carter keeps house for him, and she told Mom he was sort of particular. He was awfully nice with Grandpa, too, when Grandpa came out to see your father and talked about the horse a few days ago. And you know Mr. Bainbridge isn't so friendly, usually. I hope—I hope," Rosalind finished, innocently, "he isn't getting a case on me. I feel sort of mean not telling him that you and I are engaged! I guess he'll have a fit when he finds it out!"

"Ha!" Jack said, briefly, a sympathetic half-smile on his face although she could not see it in the darkness. It was but a half-smile because his mind was only half on her words and half wandering to other things. Was this quite the way she always talked? Slangy, rapid, careless, "like his uncle did," "hanging around," "terribly dignified," and "just *so*"? Jack was no purist, but he was a voracious and a fastidious reader, and the little table at his bedside was always coasting with heavy books. He had been quick to like Edith's chiselled speech this afternoon; he hated himself for finding Rosalind's something less to-night.

Poor little old Rose of the World! What else could she be, coming from that dreary and decadent household of non-competents? That affectionately inefficient gossiping mother, consorting with Minnie Carter and old Miss Sally, that frankly demented old grandfather, and those idle, impudent kids?

"You aren't listening to me, Jack!"

"I love you, woman. Do you love me?"

CHAPTER VI

JACK TALBOT had gone to "Elkhorn Lodge," above Fallen Leaf Lake, in the Tahoe district, for almost every year of his life. The Pearsalls and the Rogerses and the Talbots always went there, and in his small boyhood the cold swimming, the fishing and tramping, the hunting with his treasured "22," and the boating, had made it a Paradise for Jack. Later, it had seemed less thrilling, and Jack had sometimes left his mother there, to go off for camping or fishing excursions, to go with the "Wilson boys from New York" as far down even as Santa Barbara, or with the "Kansas City Fergusons" on a long walking trip through Kings River Cañon.

But this year he saw all the Tahoe neighbourhood in a new light, and the reason for the change was Edith. For the first time in his life he began to appreciate what birth and breeding, wealth and the "bel air"—to use one of the girl's favourite expressions—might do for a man.

Edith lived hard; she was almost conscientious in her pursuit of pleasure. She turned up at the nine o'clock breakfast, having ridden a wonderful ten miles or so, and now booted, gloved, sensibly gowned for golf or a tramp. She was in the lake at half-past eleven, her mouse-coloured hair capped, her boyish figure very young looking in its smart, slim bathing suit. In the afternoons she rested, and "wrastled", she told Jack, with French and German verbs, but at four she was in

evidence again, either to drive down to one of the big hotels for tea with girls—"I *love* girls!" she protested, to his scorn—or charming in thin things for tennis. Dinner was usually early, but often there were dinner dances, and Jack was naturally her escort nine times out of ten.

It was a delicious life, up among the sweet, sun-warmed pines on the lake shore, feeling healthily tired, healthily conquered or conquering at all sorts of sports, equally eager to get up in the dewy mountain mornings, or to go to bed in the chilly, forest-scented evenings. Edith and Jack toasted their feet at many a roaring log fire; he took out splinters for her, she bandaged his cut thumb; they shared the last sandwich when the "bone-head steward" underestimated trampers' appetites; he tossed her her half-dried bathing suit, and she told him regretfully that if he was going with her to the hotel he would have to change that shirt.

He had three weeks of it, and returned reluctantly to wilted Gates Mill. Gates Mill looked sordid and tumbled and uninviting after the cool, pine-scented sweetness of the lakes; River Street sweltered under awnings; stout women in white perspired and waved fans on peeling dry wooden porches; the horses in the dusty surreys about the Town Hall drooped in the thin tree shadows, and whisked languid tails.

Dory Barker was out of town—the Barkers usually went to Santa Cruz in summer—and Cecy consequently dispirited and unoccupied. Rose seemed rather pale and looked tired; it was a busy time at the Iron Works, for every department was short-handed, and vacations and illness complicated the usual rush of summer orders for the "Centipede." The girl's relationship with Jack was not yet quite comfortable; dearly as she loved

him, she could not put her tired head against his shoulder, silently, and drink in rest and comfort without explanation and without self-consciousness.

In spite of all she hoped, he was still the rich Talbot, and she the penniless Kirby. He must be amused, he must be "held." And it was hard to so hold him, and so amuse him, against so many unfavourable elements.

One night they went on a river picnic; Rose, who was tired to the crying point before they started, trying to make fun from the wretchedness of heat, clouds of mosquitoes, and the fretfulness of Audrey. Audrey had been brought because there was a cake-sale going on that same evening, by the Ladies of the Church Society, and Mrs. Kirby was busy there. Audrey often went with her on these occasions, but to-night Audrey had been peevish and unreasonable, and had wept bitterly at the thought of being denied the trip on the river.

Taken, she was full of chatter and excitement at first, gradually lapsing into tearful discomfort and sleepiness. But even so, Rose thought, the expedition would not have been quite a failure if it had not been for Roy Palmer.

Roy Palmer was a visitor in town, nobody knew anything about him; he was simply a handsome, talkative, rather coarse-grained young man who had been introduced to Cecy somewhere, and whom Cecy, inspired by what Rose secretly considered a "cheap" conviction that every evening party should be balanced equally as to sexes, and entirely upon her own initiative, had asked to accompany them.

A hundred times, during the course of the hot, bright evening, Rose had opportunity to wish devoutly that

she had come out alone with her little sisters; that there was no such problem as that of young men in the world. Jack was sulky and over-amiable by turns. He seemed given to moments of deep thoughtfulness to-night, and would emerge from them to be especially kind and gentle—yet vaguely absent-minded and impersonal, too—with Rose. Cecy, nervous and unhappy, was frankly and incessantly silly.

It was not cool, even on the river. It was a dreadful and an exhausting experience all around.

When they got back to the house, which smelled close and hot in the airless summer evening, Rose and Jack lingered at the gate.

There was no other place to linger. The house, where Audrey was whiningly preparing for bed, was unthinkable; at least the garden was dark, under the lofty trees. All the little street was filled with murmuring couples, at gates, and the arc-lights made bright pools of yellow brilliance in the thick gloom of the branches.

This harsh bright light, in the harsh, hot summer night, shone upon Rose's pallid face, which was stern with fatigue and shining with heat. She had pushed back her thick hair, and her forehead showed babyish and clear; her eyes were set in great rings of shadow.

"Well, you're worn out," Jack said, angry at the failure of the evening, and illogically angry at her, too. He bent over and kissed her, and she half-dodged the kiss, with a weary little smile. She always dodged his kisses; she seemed to have an instinctive dislike, or fear of them, he thought impatiently. "*Kiss me*——!" he said, angrily, in a low voice, catching her shoulders in a big arm like a vice.

"Hello!" Ned Kirby said, sauntering up. Jack and

Rose separated, and while Jack thought that he would like to brain this ass of a lumbering boy, Rose opened the gate and sent her brother in to bed with only her usual affectionate reproof.

"Jack, you don't think there's any harm in his just roaming about with Walt or Cliff Johnson, do you?" she asked, anxiously, when he was gone. "Hot nights like this——"

"I don't know!" Jack said, ungraciously. "Oh, my *Lord*——" he added, as Rose's old grandfather wandered along the street and stopped to greet him ceremoniously.

"Your father ain't drivin' that horse of his no longer?" said Old Man Tallifer, as Rose admitted him to the shadowy garden. "He'll have a bad spill with that feller, some day!"

Rose laughed deeply, affectionately. She had kissed her grandfather as she never had kissed Jack, and she was resting against him now like a contented baby, her hat off, her glorious hair mingling with his flowing thick beard that looked silver in the dim light.

"No, Gramp, he's driving a motor car now," she assured him, kindly. "That old horse is dead."

"There was a fire down to my office, Molly," the old man said, in a troubled tone, giving her, as he often did, her mother's name. "And I think this young feller here was at the bottom of it!" he added, shrewdly, in a loud (whispered) aside.

Rose, as were all the light-hearted Kirbys, was always amused at these vagaries on her grandfather's part. She looked at Jack now for his sympathy; but Jack was scowling. And a few seconds later he somewhat abruptly took his leave.

He walked home; his car was undergoing some tedious repairs. The clock in the Town Hall struck midnight as he crossed the square; a hot bright midnight.

All the houses of Upper River Street were closed; black squares in the shining night, with the motionless plumage of the great trees shutting them in. Inky shadows lay like lace-work in the gray moonlight, some noisy young persons from the sordid Creektown district were taking a short cut home.

"Mom tell you they ain't going to be no bazaar?" someone shouted. And a girl's voice called out from the darkness ahead: "That makes no never minds in my young life!"

"Vile, jay place!" Jack muttered, opening his own gate. Up at the hotel, in the high clean sweetness of the pine woods, there would still be dancing, to-morrow there would be swimming, tennis, walks. And he must stay in Gates Mill.

His ill-temper deepened, increased. Rose, desperate, weary, hot, pressing her limp little frocks and powdering her pale, damp face, hardly knew what to do with him. He had apparently come back from his vacation totally disenchanted with Gates Mill, and with life, and inclusively, even with herself. He was irritable, critical, ugly with Audrey and Mom and Ned. Not her prettiest dotted swiss frock—three years old, after all!—not the new eighty-five-cent spray of roses about her old chip hat, not the shy little responses she was forcing herself to make to his embraces, could win him back to the old happy mood she had loved so well.

One day he came to her, seeming like his old self; confident, definite, devoted. But it was only to tell

her that he must go back to the Lake at once; he had had a wire. His mother was ill—not dangerously ill, although she had been so for a few hours. The heart was weak, she wanted her boy, there was nothing else for him to do.

Rose saw—under his genuine concern and sympathy—how glad he was to go! How satisfied that he must go, that it was his duty, beyond all discussion or delay. A sick mother—there is but one answer to such a plea. He was leaving at once—Rose would understand? Sorry about to-night—they said it was going to be a good show; Ned would take her. He gave her the tickets; gave her the most affectionate kiss she had had from him since his return. His mother was sick, do you see?—and his father had wired for him.

It was the hottest morning of the summer. The Iron Works sweltered and crackled and rippled with burning dry heat. Shadows shrivelled against the corrugated iron walls, the breath of the opened machine-shop door was like that of an oven.

Jack sped along baking roads, his engine boiled more than once, and he stopped by wayside tanks to refill it. But gradually he came to cooler airs—up, up, up into the encircling great arms of the blue mountains, nearer and nearer the water, and the pines.

Edith came out to meet him when he reached his mother's cabin at ten o'clock, and quite simply kissed him, pressing both his big hands with her friendly little boyish hands.

"Better!" she said, briefly. And Jack put his arms about her and buried his face against her slim, boyish shoulder.

He and Edith sat on the top steps of the log-cabin

porch, and stared down at the sapphire lake and into the gently whispering pines, and talked in hushed tones, in the days that followed. It had been a close call, it was genuine ptomaine, the doctor said. Jack's father went back to Gates Mill, leaving the boy in charge of the pitifully weak, pitifully helpless little invalid.

But Lila Talbot wouldn't be babied. She had books and kind Mrs. Rogers and everything she needed, she protested. If her big boy was just there at night, where she could put her hand out and touch him, that was all she wanted! He must run off and play golf, he must keep up his tennis, please—please—please!

One night, ten days after the crisis, she patted his big, hard brown hand between her two ivory ones, and with an adorable childish air of shyness, asked him if he didn't think Edith was a pretty sweet little girl?

"She's a very remarkable girl," Jack conceded, shortly. His mother made no answer. But presently when Edith's "Jack!" sounded from the porch, as a signal that she had emerged from the Rogerses' wing of the cabin, dressed for the dance, Mrs. Talbot drew his head down against her white cheek and whispered in her favourite baby talk into his ear:

"It would make your silly old mummy awful happy, Jackie!"

He had to pretend not to understand, he kissed her cheek, kissed her hand, and rose to go.

"Because it would mean happiness for you, dear!" Mrs. Talbot said, in a mere breath of a tone. "I can see that, ducky boy. You can't. But the time is coming when you will!"

That night he told Edith about Rosalind, the girl in his father's office to whom he was virtually—well, yes,

actually, engaged. He'd liked her for six—for eight months. Did Edith remember her? She was beautiful.

Edith paled. She remembered the younger sister, Cecily. But the older one had gone to work while Edith was having her last year in the Gates Mill Grammar School.

"My dear!" Edith said, slender fingers at her cheek, breathless, her tone half-pitying, half-stunned. "I—didn't—but how should I—guess? I'm glad you told me, Jack. Thank you!"

Later she confessed in turn that Billy Davenport last June, when she was in Maine—— But she hadn't wanted to marry any one, yet. Did Jack really like him? He might be out in San Francisco this fall, and of course he would come up to Gates Mill. His uncle was Senator Davenport; that made it rather fun. And the family had that marvellous house in Jamaica Plain, and the Maine camp. Edith and his sister had been roommates in school.

The next day, when he was helping her over a fallen log upon a steep trail that ran through woods humming with midsummer stillness and sweetness, there came a certain not-unpleasant constraint upon them both. There were to be more confidences, Jack was thrillingly aware. There were secrets between them, words freighted and significant. They could no longer be alone together without a delicious fear, a delicious hope. Now Edith suddenly drew him back behind the rest of the party, and said quickly:

"Jack, I've been thinking about what you told me last night. I was a little wakeful, perhaps—I don't know why. It was a sweet thing for you to do, dear——" She paused, and smiled up at him with weary eyes.

"The 'dear' came naturally," she apologized. "Do you mind it from your little sister? This is what I was thinking. If you care for Rose Kirby—and of course you are the only person who can answer that, you mustn't let—you mustn't let—our old friendship, or what our mothers would like, or anything that has happened—has *seemed* to happen, up here at Fallen Leaf——"

She hesitated; they were standing close together now and Jack found his arm bracing the slender boyish shoulders.

"Of course, if you *don't* love her, and chivalry has something to do with it, then I think," Edith said, steadily, "that you are too much a man not to realize that it is infinitely better to tell her so now than to face a lifetime without the—the real thing! If you would rather be free—not to marry anybody, just to be—be fair to her, and to yourself, I don't have to tell you that making a clean breast of it is the only—well, the only kind and honest course!"

"I must marry her or nobody," Jack said, very low.

"You love her?" Edith questioned, quickly.

"Yes, but that isn't all of it!"

She drew back, eyes wide with astonishment and repugnance.

"You don't—you can't mean——!"

"No, of course not!" he said, sharply. "But she loves me and she trusts me. I couldn't go to her and say that I had changed."

"Not unless you *had*," Edith reasoned, steadily, after a moment's silence, "and if you *had*—well, I ask you, isn't she going to find it out, and perhaps too late? I see your point, Jack, that you can never marry unless

it is Rose Kirby. That's—*noblesse oblige*. But you couldn't do a woman a greater wrong than to marry her, not loving her, especially—especially if the circumstances weren't—weren't quite normal, to begin with. And——" She freed herself, except the firm fingers that caught his, and made a motion as if she would turn again up the trail. "And you'll tell me, whatever happens, dear?" she said. "I'm not good for much, I know that. You've got to settle it yourself. But we're always to be pals, whatever happens, aren't we?"

Not yet nineteen. She seemed to him sometimes as wise as a woman of forty; more balanced, more self-controlled than any woman of forty he had ever known!

CHAPTER VII

Less than a week later there came to Gates Mill a broiling August Saturday. It began with a heavy smothering summer fog which rose reluctantly at about eleven o'clock in the morning to let the burning, relentless sunshine through. The quiet, tree-shaded streets were deserted, such dust-powdered motor cars as moved raised soft welts upon the tarry surface of River Street, and great sails of yellow dust enveloped them on the roads.

Opposite the City Hall, on a bench outside of the Department of Justice, some old men sat and spat and occasionally talked, Nat Tallifer proud and alert in their midst. At the thick stone drinking trough tw dispirited farm horses drooped in the shafts, plung their sensitive velvet noses deep into the lukew water. There were big trees outside the City Hall, their shadows moved across the burned sidewalks a the burned grass. All the old-fashioned shutters were closed, at the hotel.

The Iron Works was not a pleasant place to be to-day. Even in these loosely constructed sheds and machine shops sickening odours drifted about; the big belt, swinging loose, yet always punctually tightening on the wheel, gave Rosalind a moment's sensation of vertigo when she passed it, and the office seemed dustier, closer, stupider than ever.

She was glad to get away, at one o'clock. All the world

was hot, but home would be at least freer and quieter than the shop, and she could wash her hair, and perhaps in the cool, early evening, wander downtown with Mary Weed. If Rosalind had an intimate friend it was Mary Weed, whose family had just risen in the world to about the point at which the Kirbys met it in their descent. Stair rods and pantries and inside shutters seemed glory to Mary, whatever their condition, and sensible, sweet, practical Mary was one of Rosalind's mainstays.

Jack, thought Rosalind, waving to Grandpa as she passed the City Hall Park, would be home on Monday. Clyde Bainbridge had just told her so. Mr. Bainbridge had also asked her if he could take her driving tomorrow.

He *must* know that she was engaged to Jack! Rosalind mused, not knowing whether to be pleased or sorry at this first evidence of his feeling for her. He was so nice, nd he was smart, too, and everyone said Mr. J. Wittin- Talbot depended upon him for everything. And n Mr. Bainbridge certainly had been charming with ndpa. If he would only fall in love with Cecy, w—it would be such fun for two sisters to be engaged to the owner presumptive and to the manager of the Iron Works!

Jack had been ten days gone, on this second visit to Fallen Leaf, and the total separation was getting to be something like five weeks. Too long—too long, for persons who loved each other! Rosalind's heart said, discouragedly. Life was pretty hot, and grimy, and monotonous with Jack away; she missed the gray car, the big, kind hand, the interested, sunburned face, with the gray eyes all for her.

He had to go to his mother, of course, and if the Gates

Mill *Republican* was right, Mrs. Talbot had been alarmingly ill, and was still a pretty sick woman. Of course, she wanted every second of Jack. But he was bringing her home on Monday probably, and then Rosalind would see him again, if only at the Works.

She drew a great breath. Ah, it would be good to see him! It would be so restful, so infinitely heartening, to see Jack again!

Her mother was out when she reached the warm, close house; she was "over to Renfrew's," Audrey said. Audrey was moping about with a suddenly developed case of poison oak: one eye was almost out of sight, there was more of it on her neck, one wrist was all puffed, and under both her skinny little knees were whole patches of the white bubbles.

Rosalind took off her office dress, put on a loose thin faded cotton kimono, washed her magnificent mane of burned-gold curls, and carried towels, a book, cotton, and the "Vulnerine" bottle out under the willows. Here while she tossed and sunned her wet head she anointed her small sister thoroughly, bandaged her with strips of an almost transparent old linen sheet, and reduced Audrey to a startlingly antiseptic aspect that delighted the eight-year-old.

"Now," said Rosalind, triumphantly, "wasn't that worth waiting for? If you'll wait just about five minutes more, until my hair is dry, I'll give you some bread and sugar."

"Rose, I love you!" Audrey said, squirming over her affectionately.

"Darling, don't give me poison oak! You know Jack is coming back Monday. Come on now, and get your bread and bring it out here, and if you play, play

gently, and don't get all your bandages loosened; and keep quiet, because Sis is going to lie down——"

She was spreading apple sauce upon baker's bread ten minutes later when a shadow fell across the kitchen doorway, and she looked up from the table, and saw Jack standing there, with an odd expression on his face.

"Jack!" she said, all ecstasy. And then in a quick, frightened tone, "Jack?"

Her rich mane was hanging loose, and under the thin kimono was only the undergarment that met her white stockings. More than a bathing suit, yes, more even than some evening dresses she had seen. But Rosalind couldn't go into his arms that way, and before Audrey——

So that she only stood staring, breathing hard, half-smiling, a little look of apprehension growing in her blue eyes.

"Hello, Rose," he said, steadily, nodding sidewise toward Audrey as he sat down. Rosalind, not moving her eyes from his face, sent the child away with a gentle little push.

"Your mother——?" she asked, in a hushed voice. For it had come to her that he brought news of death. Her first impression had been that he was not quite sober. Great sorrow might be the explanation.

"Mother's better. I'm going back to-night, and we come down next week. But I had something to say to you, Rose, and I wanted to come and say it," Jack said, a little heavily, avoiding her puzzled eyes. "You're one woman in a thousand, and I can say this to you! I've been thinking over—our plans while Mother's been ill, and I've come to the conclusion——" The words halted, although for the whole nine-hour

trip he had been steadily, steadily rehearsing them. It made him nervous to have them fail him, and he added quickly, "I've come to the conclusion that we—perhaps—made a mistake, you and I—and that we—we acted too hastily, last year! It's a pretty serious thing, and while it's not an easy thing for me to say—or wouldn't be if I didn't really think that in your heart you agreed with me——"

At this point, in the feverish imaginary rehearsal of this speech, the imaginary Rose had always interrupted him proudly and quickly with an "Is it that you want to be free, Jack?"

It was disconcerting to have the real Rosalind interpose no such helpful phrase. She was still standing at the end of the kitchen table, automatically spreading and re-spreading the second slice of Audrey's bread and apple sauce.

Now that his voice halted, her hands stopped, too. He noticed for the first time that her curly, burnished gold hair was hanging loose, and that she looked not much older than Audrey in the thin cotton kimono, with her face so oddly white, as if the heat had stricken her.

"It isn't that I don't love you, Rose," he said, with a little thick laugh. "But—here's the thing: it wouldn't be honest, and it wouldn't be fair to you, not to say this since I have felt it."

Somehow these phrases had sounded differently up under the pines at Fallen Leaf, where he and Edith had exchanged them. There they had not fallen flat, as they did here in the Kirbys' dingy kitchen, with the nickel alarm clock ticking loudly on the shelf above the mantel, and some sort of berry jam simmering on

the gas plate. Rosalind was standing deathly still; her arms hanging, her beautiful hair hanging, her eyes fixed on him, and only her breast moving.

"Better," said Jack, acutely wretched, and feeling in a sort of panic that nothing in the conversation was going as he had foreseen, "better settle this sort of thing beforehand than have ours just one more of the thousands of marriages that don't find it out until too late, you see that? I don't mean that you and I may not—some day—carry it all out just as we planned. But—the thing is—and my mother feels this, too——"

"Your mother!" Rosalind said, slowly, in a deep voice. And the two words seemed to ring in the kitchen and come back from the smoke-stained walls.

"Mother said this," he resumed, eagerly, glad at least to have ended her unnatural silence; "she said that broken engagements are nothing—that every man and girl go through this! But she said that an unhappy marriage, where perhaps children were involved, is a far greater tragedy! And, as I feel now, I am never going to marry. I am not a marrying type, or at least I don't feel as if I were. And I simply wanted to discuss it with you, Rose, and see if you didn't honestly think it is wiser——

"Of course," he presently went on, uncomfortably, after a pause, in which she neither moved nor spoke. "Of course, if we decide that we will just be good friends, as if this had never been, I shall—I *do!*—take all the blame. You can tell your family that you broke our—our understanding—and I'll tell everyone that. I'm not good enough for you, I know that; and if I've hurt you," Jack added, his eyes suddenly watering, "I shall never forgive myself! I'm only trying to do what is

honest, and to spare us both what may be years of misery——"

"Jack!" Rosalind said, suddenly, as if she were paying no attention to his words, and seeming suddenly to awaken from a sort of stupor, "have you the audacity—have you the *insolence*—to come here and tell me this?"

Her voice, as she spoke, was terrible, and the flash of her blue eyes was so stern as to be almost menacing. She was panting, her mouth firmly shut after the words, her nostrils moving. She did not take her eyes from his face.

Jack felt a second of something like panic. He half-rose from his chair at the other end of the kitchen table. Then he sat down again and said with a shocked and nervous half-laugh:

"Don't talk like that, Rose! I—I only felt that it was right to explain it."

His mother had told him that it would be an extremely difficult, an actually painful interview. Edith had expressed no opinion for the excellent reason that he had not consulted her: he had told his mother firmly that he would break with Rose Kirby but that he would never look at another woman; he had had enough of them! And in pursuance of this conviction he had deliberately avoided Edith for twenty-four hours, had tramped alone, and stayed away from one of the season's most brilliant dances, at the Tahoe Tavern.

"Better write it, Jackie boy," his mother had said, very gravely and tenderly and sympathetically, when he was flinging a few things into a bag for the brief visit to Gates Mill. "If you don't, you will come back deeper involved than ever and have it all—and more!—

to do over again. She is a pretty girl, dear, and most unfortunate, and of course she has a real affection for you—and small blame to her! She'll be married to someone else one of these days, and forget all about it. But meanwhile, I think I'd really try not to see her at all——"

But Jack would not listen to this. It satisfied some shamed, smothered, and hidden feeling in his heart, some feeling that he would not face or analyze, to force himself to this distasteful trip and this most ungrateful meeting. He had set himself, morally, mentally, almost physically, like a trap, and the springs could not loosen upon his determination to make this the end.

He wished now that he had written, prepared her in some way. There was a dreadful silence in the kitchen. Then he raised his eyes to see Rose still looking at him steadily, but with the fire and fury gone from her eyes.

"But, Jack—Jack, dear, what *is* it?" she asked, slowly. "What has happened? What have I done? Don't you—don't you like me any more?"

"I shall always like you!" Jack said, quickly, glad to be able to speak so truly.

"Yes, yes, but, Jack——" Rosalind began again, stammering suddenly, and smiling through eyes that were brimming, "that isn't the way I expected you to come back to me——" Her lips trembled, and she came a step nearer him and half-extended her hands. "I don't understand you," she faltered, trying again to smile.

Jack got to his feet, and shrugged his shoulders slightly, taking one of her hands, covering it with his other hand, and giving it a firm and friendly pressure.

"I only want you to understand that you are free,

Rose, free I hope some day to be some man's happy wife," he said, determinedly. "These things happen this way sometimes—we hear," Jack went on, now quoting his mother, "we hear that people are engaged, and then it's off, and some other engagement is on—and perhaps that doesn't work out, either——"

Rosalind was closer to him now, she had forgotten the thin loose wrap and the hanging masses of hair; forgotten everything but that the whole world had suddenly turned bewildering and agonizing and dark.

"Yes, but things don't happen that way with *me!*" she interrupted him, as he paused. "You told me you loved me, Jack. I promised to be your wife! My dear," Rose went on, laying one hand upon the big tweed shoulder where her burned-gold head had so often rested, "isn't it time to tell me that you're just fooling—that this is one of your jokes? Please, dear, don't tease me. It's been so hot and dull this week without you, and with Ned worrying us——"

"You make it very hard for me!" Jack said, irresolutely, and avoiding her eyes.

"Hard for you?" she echoed, dazedly. "But—but what do you think it is for *me?*"

"I think it is hard for both of us," Jack conceded, briefly.

Rose stared at him blankly for a few minutes. The alarm clock ticked and ticked, and the jam made a little sucking noise upon the stove.

"Everyone does it—after all," Jack said, wretchedly and irresolutely. He suddenly hated it all: the sordid shabby kitchen and the red tablecloth on the end of the table, where Audrey had had her lunch, and the dingy zinc about the sink, and the damp boards. There was a

hole in the rusty wire netting of the window behind Rose, and a large yellow-jacket was insinuating his jointed body through it, twisting himself halfway out again, and returning.

Jack felt furiously that he wanted to be done with it—safely out of it and back at Fallen Leaf Lake. He wished that he was flying along the country roads toward his mother again. His mother had told him that it would be difficult—she had warned him——

"Everyone does what?" Rosalind asked him, sharply, out of a troubled silence, during which, panting a little, and with her lips parted, she had been looking at him fixedly.

"Breaks engagements," Jack answered, uncomfortably, in a gruff voice.

Rosalind sat down at the table, and rested her bare elbows against it, and plunged her spread fingers into her glorious hair. Her eyes were dazed; she looked like a creature broken. Jack told himself with a sort of horror that it was all infinitely worse than he had expected it to be.

"The thing is," the man said, awkwardly, "if it's not a mistake, then we'll take it up again and everything'll be fine! But if it is—here's the thing—if it is, isn't it much wiser to find it out now? My mother says this—of course, I didn't ask my mother's advice—but here's what my mother says: If it's the right thing and the wise thing, well and good—go ahead. But if it's not, why then it'd be a fatal mistake——" He stopped, feeling himself that these were mere words.

"Ah——?" Rose said, slowly, infinite scorn in her tone. She looked at him steadily, her hands at her temples, the glory of her hair tumbling over them upon

her shoulders. And for a full, slow minute she said nothing more.

Jack, not caring to meet her look, put his hands in the pockets of his belted coat, leaned against the wall, and lightly stubbed one big shoe upon the discoloured old wooden floor, looking down. He felt sulky and misunderstood.

"I'm sorry you feel this way——" he muttered. His mother had said that he would not have the courage to go through with it, and he began to feel that his mother was right.

"If you go, dear, don't temporize! Be definite," his mother had said, lightly and timidly. "Don't say you'll write, or that you can decide it later, or that it is still an understanding—that's what you'll want to do. She's too fine a girl to have you treat her with anything but absolute honesty—like the courageous fellow you are. A few hours of pique, now, or a lifetime of regret."

Jack tried to remember these things now, as he stood, feeling awkward and stupid, in the Kirby kitchen, looking down at Rose's sombre and tear-stained face, and the roughened masses of her bright hair.

"Why, Rose, you don't have to take this so," he said, venturing to touch her hand hearteningly as she stretched it on the table. "I didn't mean to—break your heart! But wouldn't it break it a thousand times more, to marry you, and then to let you discover this——"

"Oh, don't touch me!" she warned him, furiously, instantly on her feet. "Don't touch me, you—you *bluffer!* You selfish, cruel beast—you! Coming down from the lakes in your high-powered car and in your

sport clothes, to dare to come here and tell me that you were just playing—that this was one of your affairs! Do you suppose that I don't know that Edith Rogers is up there at Fallen Leaf? Do you suppose that I didn't understand what your mother was trying to arrange that Sunday—weeks ago! when I had tea at your house?" Rose added, seated at the table again, her darkened eyes on space, her voice lower. "You don't think you ought to marry any one, and you are thinking only of me!" she said, smiling bitterly. "You—you coward! You let those women tell you what you ought to do—and you come down and do it, like an obedient puppy—like the man you are, who has always lived on his father's money, and felt himself better than other men, who have to struggle and fight for what they earn—felt himself better than a man like Clyde Bainbridge, who has to make his own way! He is manager of the Works, but you are put in as vice-president, just because your father is the owner!"

"I'm glad to learn what you really think of me, Rose," Jack, hurt and astonished, said youthfully. And already he could reflect that he would be glad to remember how insulting she was in her anger.

"I want to tell you something, Jack!" the girl rushed on, a veritable Fury now, with her blazing eyes, her rich hair caught hastily back with a single pin, and her breast rising and falling tumultuously. "I want to tell you something! You seem to have it all your way now —you have the money, you have nothing to lose, and I have everything! You go upon your way, and people will say that you had a flirtation with the girl in your father's office, and that it's all over. But this is what I want you to remember! This is what I want you to

remember! I am going on my knees every night to ask God to put it in my power to hurt you as you've hurt me—to shame you before your friends as you've shamed me! My hour is going to come, Jack—and when it comes, remember this Saturday that you came all the way down from Fallen Leaf to tell me that all the love we had for each other was just—playing! Playing—why, do you think that I'm ashamed to admit that whatever *you* were doing, I wasn't playing!" said Rosalind, getting to her feet to come close to him again. "Do you think I'm afraid to say that I cared—that I care!—and that I was ready to give you what you may not find everywhere—although you may find position and money and your mother's approval! I'm young in years, but I'm not a child! I know what poverty is, and what life is—and I could have given you a love and a devotion that would have been worth twenty of Rogers's Banks! You've thrown it all away——!"

She paused for a brief half-minute, but Jack, watching her with an unusual pallor upon his sunburned face, did not speak.

"Well," said Rosalind, in a low, passionate voice. "Go back to your tennis and your dancing and your white clothes. But wait. *Wait!* You are going to pay for this. I don't know how, and I don't know when. But you will pay!"

And in an agony of restlessness she began irresolutely to pace the kitchen, her face turned from him, and her feverish, brief words seemingly addressed only to herself. It impressed him oddly despite all his nervous discomfort, to see her, with no consciousness of what she was doing, draw the cooking fruit from the fire.

"Ah, yes, you'll pay for it!" she half-whispered. "It couldn't be that you would not! Some day—some day when there's something *you* want—something you are hungering—*hungering* for!" She walked toward the outer door, turned, and catching her thin garment tightly about her, and staring blindly into space, she went on: "Life isn't so short but that I shall have my hour—God won't refuse me that! Not—not for revenge—but just to show you that He's fair—that because my father is dead, and my grandfather helpless you can't shame me and hurt me—you can't turn all my happiness to bitterness and suffering! Why, dearest," Rosalind said suddenly and disarmingly after a silence, her tone tender, almost amused, and with a complete change of manner, "I love you, and you love me! Put your arms about me—tell me that you love me! Am I not your Rose of all the World?"

She was close enough to him to lay her hands upon his shoulders; now she flung back her head and half-shut her eyes. Her beautiful, slender young body and the rippling fall of her bright hair were almost in his arms.

"Kiss me, Jack!" she whispered. "I love you!"

Never in their most exquisite moments together had she so revealed her feeling. Jack, beset with a hundred jumbled and conflicting emotions, still had free some self-conscious power with which to be amazed at her. Hitherto her kisses had been shy; she would take them, if she could, upon the nape of her neck, or upon the smooth white cheek where the temple met it.

Instantly he caught her to him and bent her whole body backward, so that his sudden crushing kisses fell upon a face from which the hair had fallen back like

that of a playing child. Rose rested against him, her clasped hands against his breast, her breathing deep and exhausted, her eyes shut.

"Ah, Rose—Rose—Rose!" Jack murmured, his big arms tight about her shoulders. "Is there any one like you in the world?"

As abruptly as she had given herself to his embrace, he felt her withdraw. She pushed him to arm's-length, and stood, still held, but visibly puzzled now, and with something hostile, something menacing, beginning to dawn in her widely opened, almost frightened blue eyes.

"Kiss me!" Jack said, catching her close again. And this time he had her lips. The web of her glorious hair fell free, her eyes were closed again, and against his heart he felt the beating of her heart.

But after a moment she freed herself and he saw a strange look in her eyes. It was at once a look of hostility, of shame, of something almost like fear.

"Rose! You—you marvel!" Jack said in a whisper, staring at her, breathing hard, his arms hanging. "You—you don't think that—after this!—I could run away from you," he said, in an oddly shaken tone, taking a step after her. "Why, you—you're wonderful!" he added, under his breath, confused and laughing.

"That's it, is it?" Rose said presently, in a low tone, as if to herself. Her guarded, quiet look held him where he stood, she was studying him with a slightly lowered head and half-closed eyes. "I could hold you that way, could I?" she said in a voice of shame and self-contempt.

There was a silence, Jack looking at her in stupid be-

wilderment, definitely repulsed by her expression, without knowing why, or even that he was repulsed.

The clock ticked and ticked solemnly, there was no other sound in the kitchen. But outside they could hear the swishing fall of water from old Grandpa Tallifer's hose upon the dry marguerites and the rose bushes. The red sunlight was fading in a narrowing triangle on the stained and distempered plaster of the walls.

Suddenly Rose turned superbly, the supple slenderness of her straight young body wrapped in the cotton kimono, her hair tumbling magnificently about her shoulders. She looked out of the window, glanced casually over her shoulder, and said evenly:

"Very well, I understand you. Our engagement is broken. You are as free as if you had never met me."

Jack was still breathing hard, his senses on fire.

"Why, but—but you said you loved me, Rose!" he said, bewilderedly.

The girl shrugged, and a ripple of gold ran over her tumbled hair. She did not look at him.

"Rose——" Jack began, pleadingly, not knowing what he said, or what he hoped. "I—I'm an ass, I guess! Anyway, when I have my arms about you, I can't think of anything else in the world!" he added, boyishly.

Rose did not answer, except by a brief shrug, nor turn her head.

"You—you never kissed me that way before!" Jack added, coming a step nearer, and with something like reproachful laughter under his pleading tone.

"You can get plenty—of kisses—like that," Rose said, after a brief silence, and in a bitterly cold tone

that cooled the man's rising passion instantly to a sort of shame and anger. "You can go and tell your mother that your visit was eminently successful," she added, her voice well-controlled but brimming with quiet scorn. "You will never kiss *me* again. Go on! Go back to Fallen Leaf. Why, think of it—in ten minutes you can be racing along the road, free—free of me, the whole thing accomplished and no harm done!"

"You make it horribly hard for me, Rose," Jack said, resentfully, "I didn't mean to anger you. I was honestly—honestly worried about it, I felt that perhaps we weren't sure enough, and I—I just wanted to discuss it with you——"

"Discuss it!" she repeated, lightly, as he paused.

"Well, explain it then," he amended, sulkily. "I wanted you to understand."

"You hardly expected to enjoy the talk, Jack?" Rose asked, bitingly.

"No, I didn't expect to enjoy it!" he answered, hotly. "I felt—rotten—about it, if you want to know the truth!" he added.

"Well, now you've said it," Rose said, composedly, over her shoulder, "and it's over, and I understand. You're free. Our engagement is broken. Was that all?"

Jack had not been proud of this day's work, even in anticipation. He had confidently expected to leave her with a sense of shame and hurt in his breast, with a realization that he had been—by force of circumstances over which he had no control—unfair to a girl he really admired and liked warmly. Driving to Gates Mill this morning, he had assured himself that he would make it all up to Rose in the years to come. He

would never marry, that was certain, but he and Rose would have a rare and beautiful friendship to the end of their lives.

But this was much worse than he had planned. She was not merely reproachful; she was actually contemptuous. She had not met his reason and logic reasonably and logically, she did not seem to realize that love was an incontrollable thing, going here and there arbitrarily at its own sweet will. She had acted—badly, and as a consequence he felt unexpectedly shaken and upset. She had assumed that a man might go on loving a woman just because he wanted to!

"Now you have only to go," she said, serenely, in the uncomfortable silence that followed her last words. "You've said everything you wanted to say, and you have only to go. It's all gone nicely, and it's—it's over."

The faint emphasis on the last word, and the fact that she turned her back fully to him, were an actual dismissal. She had suddenly taken the initiative, and Jack felt like a banished puppy.

"May I say that I am sorry, Rose?" he asked, trying to regain his lost dignity.

"You may say a great many words and get an enormous satisfaction out of them," she answered, serenely, looking out of the window.

Jack's florid lean face burned even more red.

"If you choose to take it this way," he said, angrily, 'of course I have nothing to do but go."

"Nothing to do but go," Rose repeated, as he did not stir.

"Someday we'll be friends again," Jack predicted, unhappily. "You'll see——"

"No," the girl said with unexpected swiftness, "we'll never be friends again. I never want to see you—I never want you to speak to me again!"

"I'm sorry," Jack answered, his dignity somewhat restored in proportion to her emotion and anger.

His cap was on the table. He picked it up, watching her closely. Rose had turned now, and was facing him with sombre eyes. He went to the door and stood irresolute.

"I shall go," he said, puzzled and hurt. "But—but I know you won't be angry at me long!"

Silence. Silence. He put his hand on the door.

The gray car was waiting in Old Mill Lane for the last time. Audrey and a rabble of neighbourhood children were playing Prisoner's Base in the yard. It was the hottest hour of a breathless, burning summer afternoon.

"Will you say good-bye, Rose?" he asked, a little thickly.

She did not answer, but stood there with her head hanging a little, her blazing eyes fixed strangely, almost fearfully, upon his face, her colour flushing and paling, flushing and paling, and her breath coming short.

"Good-bye," Jack said. She only stared at him.

"I'm sorry!" he added, awkwardly, in the deathly stillness of the kitchen. "Good-bye."

Rose did not stir, she made no sound. Only her eyes flickered once more, with a shadow over their blue like wind upon a lake. The clock ticked, tocked, ticked, tocked, punctual and loud. Red streamers from the sinking sun fell hot across the kitchen through the old pepper trees outside.

Jack went softly through the open door, and down

the steps, and to his car. The starter failed at a first attempt, and he cursed it nervously. Then he was moving, under the big trees between the shabby fences, then he had turned, he was in River Street—he was out of Gates Mill, running smoothly along the burning highway, putting the miles behind him—behind him—behind him——

His face flamed under its tan. Well, it was over. Well, it was over. He had hoped, travelling this same road in the cool early hours this morning, he had hoped for this moment, when he could say: "It is over."

He felt like a dog. He was a dog.

But it was over, and he was heading back to the lake, and—he hoped bitterly—back to his mother's approval! It would serve his mother damn well right after this if he married some woman who was an absolute rotter—his mother, who had criticized Rose's position and Rose's family! It would serve his mother right if, when they came down to town next Wednesday or Thursday—for she had told him last night that she would like three or four days more of coolness before returning to Gates Mill—it would serve her right if, when they got back to Gates Mill, he simply resumed his affair with Rose, proved to his mother and Edith and all the rest of them that he loved Rose!

"I broke it off, it's over," he would say to them, "and now I'm going right back to my girl again!"

It was over, anyway. What a little spitfire Rose had been, and what a little sport! Or had she been a sport? Edith, discussing a purely hypothetical case, in which a purely hypothetical man of honour had implied to a lady that his feeling had cooled, had said more than once: "Of course the girl would drop him *instantly.*

She would more than meet him halfway! Hold a man who admitted that he no longer loved her?" Edith had said. "Why, I don't care what type of girl she was, she'd be too proud for *that!*"

Rose hadn't taken that attitude, exactly. She had raged and reproached him. And then so violently to dismiss him! She hated him, now——

But at least she had understood him; he had had courage enough for that. He had not equivocated, he had made it extremely plain. And if they didn't love each other—*if* they didn't—this was the only honest way! Anyway, he could tell his mother that it was *off*. The difficult part of the matter was over.

His mother would tell Edith, and Edith would have to understand that Jack was in no mood for confidences, for philandering, for explanations. The rest of his stay at the lake would be merely a matter of duty to his mother——

He began to think of broken engagements. It was soothing to remember the attitude of the men he had known in college toward them.

Well, it was over. But he wished she had not been spreading that bread with apple sauce for Audrey——

He felt like a dog.

Cecy came home about half-an-hour after Jack left, and Audrey ran to meet her across the yard and whispered to her busily for almost five minutes. Cecy's young face grew grave and even a little pale as she listened; she glanced apprehensively toward the kitchen door, and finally put the little girl aside and tiptoed cautiously over to the porch, and mounted the steps, and peeped timidly into the kitchen.

The sun's banners had fallen a little lower, they glinted upon worn woodwork, limp dish-towelling, battered tins. The alarm clock on the shelf above the sink ticked, tocked, ticked, tocked, punctual and loud.

Rosalind was standing with her back to the kitchen table, slightly resting against it, one arm dangling loose, the fingers of the other behind her, and braced against the table's dark, split, unstained, and unpainted wood. Her head was hanging a little, her sombre eyes fixed curiously, almost fearfully, upon space. She looked like a little animal, desperate and at bay. Only her breast moved fitfully, and her colour paled and flushed and paled again.

Cecy did not address her. She put in her head and watched her sister fearfully for a long minute. Then she retraced her steps, and gave Audrey a frightened look, and started running at full speed toward old Mrs. Renfrew's, for Mom.

CHAPTER VIII

"Well," said Cecilia, hopefully, "I don't suppose anything matters as much as we think it does in this life. You—you—we go on living!"

Rosalind Kirby, after a careful inspection of it, slipped a spoon back into the grayish, lukewarm dish water in which Cecilia was finishing the Sunday dinner dishes. It was about four o'clock upon a shining October afternoon; the heavy leafage of the maples and locusts in the yard was thinned now, and the sunlight that crept through their shabby branches was thinner, too.

"Yes," Rosalind answered, lifelessly, after a pause, "I go on living, because—because I don't die."

Cecy looked a trifle frightened.

"Oh, Rose, you don't feel as badly as ever?" she asked.

Rose shrugged and was silent. There was a certain sternness in the face that was bent attentively to the old mismatched cups and plates, and in the blue eyes there was a faint, habitual half-frown that somehow accentuated and made more appealing her extraordinary beauty. She recaptured the spoon, wiped it, picked up dishes and glasses, and went to and from the china closet steadily.

Cecilia unhappily mopped the old sink boards, inverted the dish pan, spread the dish rag upon it, and finally rubbed her brown little gipsy hands with half a cut lemon and rinsed them in the cool water that was now all that came from the hot-water tap.

When she had finished Rose was standing at the window, staring out with unseeing eyes at the bare trampled ground under the willows, the stretch of old fencing behind the new Eureka Garage on River Street, the pale floating discs of the cosmos that Grandpa had planted beside the house.

"Rose," Cecelia began, timidly, coming to put an arm about her, "lots of people have—have quarrels—and after awhile make them up—and you and Jack will, too!"

For that Rose's trouble was but a lovers' quarrel was Cecilia's, and the family's, and indeed all Gates Mill's interpretation of the sudden violent rupture between Jack Talbot and Rosalind Kirby, unless indeed Edith Rogers and Jack's mother admitted, in their most secret confidences, that this was not all the truth. If Rose had something to bear in pity for the loss of brilliant prospects and in censure that any girl could play her cards so badly, at least she saved her pride to a certain extent. Nobody knew—nobody knew—nobody would ever know!

After the earthquake that had torn her life from its moorings and shattered her youthful faith and hope and gaiety at a single blow, somehow suppertime had come—bedtime had come—morning had come. Other persons had gone on doing the usual things, and the punctual sun had set, and presently risen, and presently set again, unaffected by the ruin and ashes, the fallen temples and the darkness in the heart of Rosalind Kirby.

During the first of these hours the girl had lain motionless on her bed, her handkerchief a sodden ball in her hand, her eyes staring blankly into space. Some-

times she cried quietly, flooding tears that were mopped away and brimmed again; but for the most part she was tearless, breathing so lightly, moving so little, that she was more like death than life.

What had roused her had been her alarmed and anxious mother. Mrs. Kirby rarely did what she planned to do, and was much given to imaginary courses of action, and her children knew it. But when, in the burning heat of the Sunday morning that followed Jack's visit and their parting, Rosalind's mother had threatened tearfully to write to Jack Talbot—to wire him—and tell him he would have to come back for some sort of an explanation, things couldn't go on this way, Rosalind had roused herself desperately.

With an aching head, weakened by wakefulness and emotion, she had somehow dressed, somehow massed her hair together, somehow got herself downstairs. She had drunk thin hot tea, played with her food, filled her teacup again, and stared before her with lack-lustre eyes. Addressed, she had started, answered civilly and indifferently; commanded, she had meekly, almost absently, obeyed.

After that her reactions had followed each other rapidly, in the normal order. For days she had gone through the business of going to the office, of dressing, of coming to meals, like an automaton. She had eaten little and spoken not at all. And in the wakeful nights Cecilia had heard her crying.

Then came the end of the first dragging, bewildered, stunned week, and Jack had come back, and she had caught a glimpse of him at the office.

He had been helping his father into the car, out in the parking space between the two big wings of the Iron

Works. Rosalind's colour had fled, her heart had begun to hammer painfully. Jack, perhaps twenty feet away from her, had flushed deeply, and lifted his hat.

Then he had got into the car and father and son had driven away. And Rosalind had entered into the second phase of her unhappiness.

A sort of hardness had come over her. What she had hoped, of that first opportunity for a talk, or a word, or a look from him, she had never analyzed. But she had been living for that.

Now he was home again and he had not sought it. And bitterness and coldness had taken the place of the very luxury of grief in which she had been indulging.

Rosalind had resumed her old scrupulousness about her appearance, her old promptness at the office, her old efficiency at home. But it was a new Rosalind. Gone was the confident, joyous, carefree girl who had been so sure that life would meet her kindness with kindness, and her generosity with gifts. She was no longer a girl, she was a woman, a woman who felt that her destiny had been unjustly decreed, and that she owed the world a grudge.

All the unsensed bitterness of her childhood and young womanhood seemed awaiting the recognition of this hour, and as she reviewed it, the deep, cold anger hardened in her soul. The Tallifers and the Kirbys had been the rich and prosperous people of Gates Mill only a few years ago. Where was their thrift, their industry, their intelligence, that the daughter of the line should be so cruelly humiliated? Why should the Kirbys be less to-day than the Rogerses and the Talbots, why should Rosalind Kirby leave the public High School to take a position in the grimy office of the Iron

Works in the very years when Edith Rogers was sent to New York to finish her education, and Jack Talbot could come driving home from Fallen Leaf Lake to tell Rosalind that his mother felt her not good enough, not rich enough, not educated enough to be welcome in one of the Upper River Street families?

Seen in this new light, all the pitiful pretenses and gentilities of her mother's home maddened her. It was all so futile, so stupid: the mild, complacent boasting of Mrs. Kirby, the references to the days when Grandpa had a big office on River Street, the treasuring of fans and clocks, newspaper clippings dated '78, and Nottingham lace curtains of what Cecy gaily called "the late General Grant period"—"the first lace curtains ever seen in Gates Mill, and how people did stare at our windows!" Rosalind's mother always said with a reminiscent smile of pride and happiness when, at long intervals, she washed their frail and soggy lengths with her own hands.

What mattered these things, Rosalind mused, with hot contempt. What if Grandpa had given the land for St. Mary's Church, and the Library, and the High School? What if that was the Tallifer set of Encyclopædias in the Public Library, and if half the old men and women in town could remember when Daddy and Grandpa were the most conspicuous among all the early settlers? Grandpa's mellow wisdom, his famous talks before Gates Mill's first little Board of Trade, his inventive genius and his mayoralty—this was all in the past. Daddy was but a memory, a grave where high grass and poppies disputed with the geraniums and the crimson rambler that Mom had planted upon it, and Grandpa was a doddering old man, mut-

tering of Injuns and Spanish Grants, and the big fire in River Street.

Life had left the Kirbys and the Tallifers behind. The realities to-day were the Terrys' and the Barkers' and the Rogerses' big, garden-enclosed houses in Harrison Street and Upper River Street, their cars, their trips, their happy arrogance and confidence as they fluttered in and out of shops and bank, played five hundred and ate orange sherbet on shaded porches on the warm spring afternoons, and gave each other "kitchen showers" and baby spoons.

What was it to them that their names were not inscribed in the old archives of the City Hall, that it was not their grandparents who had formed the first Vigilante Committees and laid out the first streets? They could sit and listen to the town band upon a hot evening with no resentment that it played in Tallifer Park; they did not grudge Rosalind's late father the distinction of having been the Kirby for whom Kirby's Dam up the Poorhouse Road and in the canyon where they all picnicked in summer, was named.

Why should these supremely fortunate young persons treasure horsehair chairs and painfully sewn "Log Cabin" patchwork quilts, Rosalind had asked herself, sick with self-contempt. Mom might deceive herself if she pleased, might pretend that in some obscure quality the daughters of the Terrys and Rogerses were infinitely inferior to a Kirby, be that Kirby as poor and as handicapped as she would. But Rosalind saw clearly at last, saw every crack and spot and stain in the old house in Old Mill Lane, saw the pretense and the unreality of it all, and hated it.

Resentful, brooding, smarting under a sense of es-

sential and undeserved injustice, she went upon her way, looking out upon life with eyes that tried to pierce its secret, and master it. Something—*something* made certain persons rich and influential, and made others just the reverse. The Terrys and the Talbots had all been poor and obscure only a generation back; they had risen somehow to their present preëminence.

As they had risen, she would rise, Cecy should rise, Ned should rise. If it was thrift, energy, infinite capacity for taking pains, then Rosalind should have these. What they had done for others they should do for her. She had been cruelly handicapped, fatherless, and with the good and powerful man who might have been her grandfather, for thirty-five years less than dead. But let them wait—let the superior Terrys and Rogerses—let Jack Talbot wait another thirty-five years!

To be sure she, Rosalind, would be something like fifty-six or fifty-seven then. And that, to her twenties, was to be old past caring! But it might be a daughter of hers, another Rosalind, who should treat Jack's son as he had treated her mother! Rosalind's children should have the pony-carts, the leisure, and it should be "old Jack Talbot" who had descended in the world, who was enduring the humiliations and the deprivations.

"His people were well-to-do, too," the world would say. Rosalind experienced a distinct comfort on the day when she meditated upon the number of struggling and needy acquaintances her mother had, of whom that might be said. What did make some people rich, and others poor, anyway? How did one go about it?

Sign posts were not lacking, and in the hungry desolation of her soul Rosalind's eyes were sharpened to

find them. In the little vegetable store on Old Mill Lane was a calendar bearing the words: "The way to begin to be successful is to begin." In Rogers's Bank window was a neatly framed reminder: "Tell me whether or not a man saves money, whether it be merely a few cents a week, and I will tell you whether he is or is not a failure."

In Audrey's Reader, also, there was a debate between a certain Arthur and a certain Charles upon the question of a budget. Arthur was all for charging his purchases, spending his money, and earning more as need arose. Charles was for apportioning it logically, and placing a small amount every week toward "emergencies." And Charles was conceded to have had the advantage in the argument.

Then Rosalind stumbled upon newspaper articles: this one pointing out the enormous building and business that had been erected upon the tiny profits from five and ten cent purchases, and that one urging young women to study, to learn, to prepare themselves in advance for the opportunities for which they certainly would have no time to prepare themselves as they arrived.

A difficult time for the Kirby household followed. For Rosalind, stern, critical, determined, undertook the hopeless task of raising her own family to some sort of ideal of efficiency. The slipshod marketing, the waste and delay, were all mercilessly scored by her budget, her account books, and her new estimate of life.

For awhile she had been for selling the old place and moving into a small, new cottage in crowded King Street across the river. But the mere possibility had reduced her mother to tears.

Nobody, wailed Mrs. Kirby, nobody but the mill hands, the Italians and Irish and Japs and Chinese, lived in King Street! The Tallifers simply couldn't—the whole town would know it——

"We could get one of those new seven-room places for seventeen hundred dollars," Rosalind had argued. "We could get seventeen hundred dollars, over and above the mortgage, for this place. If that new block of business buildings goes up in River Street next year, this would be a valuable site."

"Business buildings!" her mother had said, horror drying her eyes. "My darling, you wouldn't—you couldn't let them tear down the house?"

"But that's all it's good for, Mom. Unless we turned it into four apartments."

"But, Rose dear, it's one of the landmarks—it's one of the few handsome old houses in town! Why, the glass for these windows came around the Horn! And I can remember that a Swiss built the stable and sent all the way to his brother in Berne for the clock! Why, everybody talked about it—even as far as Sacramento and Vallejo!"

Rose would sigh impatiently. Life was so tiresome! She had to concede this special point to her mother, for Cecy joined her in pleading for the old home. But Rose fought on, and presently the big unused parlour and library were rented to widowed Kate Connor and her crippled sister Ellie Kane, and Kate put a brass sign just above the big laurustine bush under the front bay window: "Modes."

Cecilia might have objected to this, but Rosalind took it so coldly for granted that the younger sister was quite unconsciously influenced by her. Mrs. Kirby felt

that she could never hold up her head again, but she was anxious to please poor Rose, and was allowed to hope for a week or two, anyway, in her usual inconsequential manner, that presently Rose would get over this quarrel with Jack and things would return to their old comfortable ways.

The ten dollars a week from Mrs. Connor shocked Mrs. Kirby. She always took it deprecatingly, telling them that if it wasn't convenient——?

It was, however, always convenient, for their selection of a new situation, so near busy River Street, proved a wise business step for the dressmakers. So Mrs. Kirby began to offer them coffee in the mornings, or a hearty dish at noon; they didn't want to be fussing with cooking in that little side entry with just a gas plate on a table!

The result was that before the end of the fourth week Mrs. Kirby was boarding Kate and Ellie at a sum that actually scared her, and an old Mexican named Concha had been impressed into service as dish-washer and table-setter. Mrs. Kirby brightened amazingly under this influx of life and interest, and was often in the dressmaking parlours in the afternoons, helping, gossiping, and deeply interested in the new gowns that the women of Gates Mill were having made.

Cecilia enjoyed the freedom from kitchen responsibility, and Ned and Audrey, and in that sense, Rosalind's grandfather, were also young enough to enjoy the change, the new audience, the added stir and excitement.

It was only Rosalind who bore it with no expression of feeling, for or against. It had been "disgracefully slovenly," it had been "just a public scandal," the way

things went in the Kirby house, she had said, and something at least had now been done to better matters. In September, she had another opportunity. The Terry Flour Mill offered her better work at better pay, and she left the Talbot Iron Works and went over to them.

In other ways, her new-found, passionately concentrated energies found a pleasanter form. She borrowed histories from the Library and read them sombrely. She went to Miss Cartier for French on three evenings a week; she followed plays and books seriously in the Sunday newspaper.

Miss Cartier's stuffy little room, hanging like a bird cage over the river, and scented with upholstery and old books and dust and dry trembling-grasses and general decay, was no pleasanter to Rosalind's senses than was the shaky old lady herself, laying a papery, chilly old hand over the girl's hand, and diffusing a stale faint odour of must and snuff and attar of roses.

But Rosalind was bitterly determined to better herself, and she spent her noon hours over verbs, and worked during whole evenings at home scribbling French in an old account book headed "Tallifer and Kirby," making such extraordinarily rapid progress that presently the old teacher was hurt.

"But you—you have deceived me? You surely have spoken French as a child?"

"No, Mademoiselle. But I assure you. Never!"

It had been only about two weeks after his return with his mother and the entire Rogers family to Gates Mill, that Jack Talbot's engagement to Edith Rogers had been announced. For all the agony of fear with

which she had been anticipating it, Rosalind had found it hard to believe.

Kate Connor had told her, told her kindly. It was twilight, and the two sisters were moving a first installment of their effects into the Kirby house.

"I was working at Pottle's to-day, making the old lady a blue alpaca—Mrs. Pottle thinks a sight of her old mother," said Kate. "Nothing'll do but that the old lady has just what she wants, whoever else goes without! And I heard Sally say that Edith Rogers was giving a girls' lunch, Tuesday week.—I'll thank you not to scratch that victrola, young man!" Kate had humanely interrupted herself to say with apparent absorption in the details of moving in.

Rosalind had stood still, frozen. A girls' lunch in Gates Mill meant only one thing; she was prepared for it. They were engaged!

Well, she had expected this. But the world went black about her none the less, and she tasted salt.

"They say three moves are as bad as a fire," Kate Connor, her back turned full to Rosalind, was saying philosophically. "I declare I'm beginning to believe it!" She bustled out of the room, and Rosalind loved her from that hour.

Edith announced her engagement prettily at this luncheon. There were twelve girls; two came from Sacramento, and one all the way from San Francisco for the occasion, and the table was decorated with bride roses, and there was a pink bell of tissue-paper roses hanging from the chandelier. When the pink ice cream came in, and the frosted angel cake, each girl pulled one of the pink ribbons that dangled from this

bell, and out fell a shower of tiny paper roses, and upon each rose was an arrow, piercing two paper hearts lettered "Edith" and "Jack."

Then there were shrieks of laughter and delight and much kissing and every one of the twelve young women had to tell exactly when she had begun to suspect it, and why she had not suspected it sooner.

The news was going about the Iron Works by four o'clock; at five it had reached Terry's Mill. But Rosalind had the poor satisfaction of realizing that she had predicted it to Mr. Bainbridge a week ago, and to Agnes Parrott, in the billing office.

"Jack Talbot is going with Edith Rogers," Rose, with a sensation of actual vertigo, had said.

"For heavens' sake!" Agnes, rapidly readjusting everybody's position in the matter, had responded, without too keen a look. That was it, of course—that explained everything—Agnes's thoughts had run eagerly. "Leave it to money to marry money!" she had said. "He can have my slice of her, for all me!"

"Are you so surprised?" Rose had asked, airily. "I'm not. I've been expecting it!"

CHAPTER IX

JACK himself, had Rose but known it, had been experiencing several surprises in connection with the same matter. In the first place, he had left Rosalind upon that memorable, burning August Saturday with a hot and angry determination to see her again immediately raging in his heart. Her kisses, the sudden revelation of the love she had always concealed from him, her youth and beauty, and above all these the power of her personality, the force and character that shone behind the blue eyes, had had their instant effect upon him.

His mother might be partially right—anyway, she was his mother—anyway, what was the difference—his confused and baffled thoughts had run—anyway, he loved his girl! He loved Rosalind—he always had—she was mad at him now, but that wouldn't last——

Then had come the long drive alone back to Fallen Leaf Lake and his confident, convalescent mother. And quietly, as his blood cooled, he had begun to veer once more toward her point of view.

Not that he loved Rose the less. Not at all. But his mother had nettled him by her sureness this morning that he would not have courage to break with Rose Kirby, and he had done it. That it was not a permanent break, his mother need not know—now. Time enough for that when they had returned to Gates Mill, and things had quieted down, and he had seen Rose.

Now when his mother put her inevitable, tentative

question, it would be satisfying to answer her with an unequivocal, "Yes." It had been the logical, the sane, the advisable thing, had it? Very good. He had done it.

"But—but she hasn't released you, Jackie?" his mother would say, hardly crediting her own ears.

"Certainly!" he would nod briefly. And he would go out of the cabin alone, and walk and walk and walk through the pine woods, until he had thrown off the tugging heartache, this persistent feeling that somehow he had irreparably hurt Rose—Rose with her tangle of burned-gold curls, and her busy little work-worn hands spreading bread for Audrey.

The first part of this programme had gone exactly as he foresaw it. His mother had hovered about him on Sunday morning as he had his late coffee in his room, and had finally touched the sore spot with just an enquiring monosyllable, and Jack had said, "Certainly!"

"But—but she hasn't released you, ducky?" his mother had duly gasped, really pale with surprise and emotion.

"I tell you our engagement is broken! But that doesn't mean that I don't love Rose and that it may not all be on again some day, if she'll have me!" Jack had said, roughly and bitterly.

Tears had crept slowly into his mother's loving, anxious eyes. She had come over to lay her head against his shoulder, as he stood up and took his cap.

"Jackie, if you care for her, of course it'll all be on again some day!" she had said, gently. Jack had kissed the top of her hair, remorseful, irritated, impatient, and had strode out to walk. He had not seen Edith all that day.

But there had been a tennis tournament afoot to wind up the sports of the summer, and he and she had been drawn as partners for the match. They had played and won Tuesday morning, played and won Tuesday afternoon.

On Wednesday came the semi-finals and quite an audience gathered to watch the play. Edith had been brief, businesslike, silent with Jack since the preceding Friday. She had gone to the Monday night dance with a person Jack characterized as "the Marshall ass."

On Wednesday there was clapping from the rising tiers of seats when she and Jack walked on to the court, and she looked up, smiling and waving her racket.

"Aren't they nice?—They want us to win!" she said to Jack, appreciatively, as they sent a few idle balls over the net. Their rivals were a married woman expert who boasted of her many cups, and a mild little dentist from Oakland whose wife made herself rather disagreeable about "Perce's" prowess. It was an open secret that public sympathy was with pretty Miss Rogers and Jack Talbot.

"We go down to-day," Jack predicted, springing a ball from the ground with the tip of his racket. "They'll beat us six-nothing, six-nothing, six-nothing."

"Surely!" Edith conceded with a philosophic smile. "And then they'll play Coates and Miss Reinhardt to-morrow."

"That'll be worth watching," he said, moodily.

"Jack, I'm so sorry!" Edith had time to breathe softly, before the first real ball came over the net.

"Thanks!" he grunted without looking at her as they moved to their positions for the play.

Early in the game, however, by one of the miracles that make all sports, their opponents' shots began to go wild. Presently there was a score of a six-two set in Edith's and Jack's favour. Edith's eyes shone and her cool cheeks flushed and she settled down to hard work.

The minutes flew; shadows flashed on the clean court, patters of applause broke from the bleachers; "we've got them on the run," Jack murmured when the play brought him near her.

"At least we've scored!" she said between her teeth when the next chance to speak occurred, and served an ace.

The exquisite moment came; it was over. They had won. The little dentist leaped gallantly over the net and shook Jack's hand. The married player wrapped her wrist in a handkerchief and explained smilingly to a few friends that she had wrenched her hand in the first set—had they noticed? Tough luck! But never mind, Miss Rogers and Mr. Talbot had played a splendid game—congratulations!

Edith and Jack went to the dance together that night and were complimented, and laughed deprecatingly, over and over again. They had had great luck, they said. "And now I don't care how disgracefully we go down—down—down to-morrow!" Edith said into his shoulder as she yielded her beautifully frocked, beautifully marcelled little person into his arms for an encore dance.

But next day was another triumph. To be sure Bob Coates was decidedly off his game, and Miss Reinhardt was terribly worried about the news from her married sister, and only played to be obliging. How-

ever that was, Edith and Jack found themselves delightfully famous; Edith said it was all Jack, Jack said that she was the best woman player he had ever seen, bar none.

And that night it was settled that he and his mother should wait over three days more and go home with the Rogerses. They could divide up comfortably with three cars.

So the pleasant life of tennis and swimming and tramping recommenced, only Jack and Edith had something real, something tragic and important upon which to base their confidences now. And on the very last night of all Jack told the girl that years from then when—when some other things were settled, he had something to say to her.

Edith elevated her eyebrows.

"Other things? What other things?"

Well, he wanted to work up in the business, for one thing. He wanted to be able to take his father's place, when "anything happened" to J. Wittinger. And then—well, there was something else that worried him——

"You want that girl to be happy, Jack," Edith interpreted. "And so she will be—you'll see! And then——?"

Jack had but a confused idea of his answer. He never knew exactly what it was. But unquestionably it was to this answer that his mother indirectly alluded when she whispered to him late that night: "Edith told me something that *might* be, Jackie—and I'm so happy!"

The next day the "comfortable arrangement" appeared to be that he should drive Edith home with Carrie, the Rogerses' baby's coloured octogenarian nurse,

dozing in the back of the car, and for all the long eight hours Edith was sweet, sympathetic, interesting, companionable, gay. That night both families dined together in Gates Mill.

And twenty-four hours later Sally Pottle seized a chance to say in an aside to Jack:

"I know, Jack. And I think it's perfectly corking!" and immediately a hundred tiny circumstances conspired to assure him that he and Edith were engaged. The attitude of her father, the motherly kiss her mother gave him, her own half-dutiful, all-adoring deference to him, his mother's deep satisfaction and delight, his father's serious talk when the senior Talbot told his son just what he might expect of the family firm, just what "your mother and I propose to do for you, when you young folks decide to take us into your confidence," had all been significant.

Immediately Edith showed him a length of lace from Aunt Lizzie, and a teacup from one of "the girls." Weren't people perfectly wonderful? she asked.

Jack found himself carried along on the tide of it, swept from one happy party to another, never quite definitely challenged, never given a chance openly to explain.

Then there was the announcement luncheon, and the *Republican* gave the news a whole column on Saturday, and everything was settled. All the different office employees at the Works came up and congratulated Jack, and the Rogerses and Terrys and Barkers gave dinner parties and all the girls gave guest-room, and kitchen, and garden "showers" in turn.

Since her quiet disappearance from his father's office, Jack had not chanced to see Rosalind. But about a

week after his engagement was made public he happened to be with Bozzy at the Terry Mills, and he saw her.

"Come on into the old man's office," Bozzy Terry said to him, in the heat of the early October afternoon. "Nobody's there! Pop asked me to find out if an invoice had been mailed."

It was just five o'clock, the whistle had blown, and the mill workers were streaming out of the big white gates. Bouncing little light cars threaded the stream, and dust rose in clouds above the bare-headed girls and the racing boys.

There was a great deal of clean cement inside the gates and geraniums blooming against white paint. Jack did not often come to the mill, and he felt that any Talbot employee who transferred his allegiance here was disloyal. But the place had for him the painful interest of the rival.

There were two girls in old Terry's otherwise deserted office: one was Agnes Parrott, a plain, sweet girl, whose one ambition was to enter the Notre Dame novitiate. Agnes was filing letters; she glanced over her shoulder as the young men came in, smiled, nodded, turned back, and resumed her filing.

The other girl was Rosalind. Facing Agnes, she was also facing Jack, but she did not raise her eyes. She went on murmuring to Agnes as if there had been no interruption.

The instant he saw her Jack's heart gave a plunge, and he felt his throat thicken, and his mouth go dry. Instantly she was the most vital thing, the only important thing, in a world that had of late been so confusing and so unreal.

She looked a little flushed and weary after the long Indian summer day, and it seemed to him that she was thinner. But the office windows were wide open now, the cooling, late afternoon air was beginning to stream through, and Rosalind stood where the breeze fluttered her thin dress and lifted the soft little rings of burned-gold on her temples. She was wearing a familiar gown of cross-barred muslin, snowy and soft from a hundred washings, and she had a broad-brimmed straw hat, wreathed in big white daisies, in her hand. Her blue eyes smouldered like sapphires between the thick, up-curling lashes, she looked young, touchingly small and sweet, as she stood talking to big-boned, black-haired Agnes.

"Say, I haven't had a chance to congratulate you, Jack," said Agnes, with a big-toothed smile, coming over to him. She had been through Grammar School with him, was only some three years younger than he. As she spoke, he got one straight, serious look from Rosalind's eyes, a look that might have been merely indifferent, or that might have held a shadow of reproach, and a shadow of mockery.

If they had had this moment alone! If he might have gone to her side, challenged her attention with the passionate and penitent words that were twisting like an agony in his heart! If he might have said, "Rose—it's all like a bad dream. You are all my world—I love you! Help me to set it straight!"

The mere thought shook him like a sudden violent vertigo. One moment he had been thinking only the conventional, slightly bored, slightly worried thoughts that seemed to be a part of being engaged; he had been wondering if his vest had come back from the cleaner

for that dinner to-night, he had been wishing that something would happen to take the attention of his entire circle, if for only five minutes, from Edith and himself. It made the whole thing so—so darned definite, and imminent, somehow, Jack had mused, to have the whole crowd eternally harping on it!

This during one moment. And in the next every pulse in his body was thrilling, his heart was hammering, his hands were cold, and all the world had been reduced to two elements: himself and Rosalind Kirby.

The precious instant was lost. She had given him that one strange steady look, she had pressed the hat over her rich shining hair, quietly opened the outer door, and nodded a casual good-night to Agnes and Bozzy, who, conferring about the invoice, stood between her and Jack.

For a moment the setting sun caught her in the doorway, proud young figure, flushed beautiful face, thin white gown pierced by the streaming rays of light, and golden head crowned by starry daisies. Her whole body was captured by an aureole, silhouetted boldly and exquisitely against the flaming west.

Then she was gone, and a great shadow and blankness seemed to fall upon Jack and the office and the world. God, how beautiful she was—what a woman she was! He had seen her trim that daisied hat on a throbbing spring morning not six months ago, he had seen her pressing with a hot iron the limp little cross-barred muslin. "I'll wear my cross-bar!" she would say; or Cecy would ask: "Are you going to wear your cross-bar?"

Cecy had always liked him—of course she hated him

now. And into that gloomy old house of dimness and memories, of gaslights and worn carpets, of bread puddings and poverty and privations, he had brought fresh distress. She was proud enough, she was cool enough now, but perhaps she had cried.

His heart twisted within him. And from this moment there came a new unreality into the unrealness of his engagement to Edith; he was tortured with the dream of going to find Rose. She would forgive him, she would understand. If her mother and his, her whole family and his, all their friends and their world despised him, he would win her back and she would understand.

Jack, formally taking his place at Edith's side, was in spirit eternally driving the gray car to Old Mill Lane, entering the familiar side passage with his heart struggling like a bird in his breast, asking if Rose were at home——

She might be furious; it did not matter. Angry, contemptuous, cold, she would still be Rose, with her golden hair filming over her earnest blue eyes, and the little humorous twist to her beautiful mouth, and the straight, honest look, diverted to him for a moment from Ned's algebra or Audrey's paper dolls, and to be returned to the little brother and sister who needed her, so kindly, so patiently——

A sort of obsession seized him, and he began to feel that the whole world would be well lost if he might have her back. Edith—Edith was a smart, clever kid, he liked her. But Rose was his own—his Rose of the World, who had been in his arms, who had talked to him of the future, with her hand linked in his, who had given him the full glory of her beauty, her intelligence,

her overflowing wit and sunshine and ambition, her hopes and plans.

He would go to Old Mill Lane and ask to see Rose. Cecy would come to the door, amazed and startled. Rose? Well, all right. And then she would call, "Rose—Jack's here!"

Rose might not see him the first time, nor the second time. But sooner or later——

His heart sang. It was all clear. He would take his girl and get away from it all, from Gates Mill. They would go together to some new place and make their fortunes as their fathers had!

All his thoughts were upon that first burning interview. He would say—and she would answer—and he would speak again. The instant he was alone his mind was busy upon it. Nothing else counted, it mattered little what his mother and Edith said and did, for everything depended upon that meeting, that memorable talk whose ending should find Rose in his arms again——

Jack's thoughts would stop short, suffocated with felicity. He would presently begin again, with the moment when he would turn into Old Mill Lane.

CHAPTER X

"I HAVE a date for Monday night, Edith," he said, one evening.

"Monday? All right. Wrestling match?"

"Nope. Something I promised to do a long while ago and it's got to be done."

"Tell me at once," Edith smiled, getting on the arm of his chair.

"I'll tell you afterward," Jack promised.

"Afterward? After we're married? I should think you would. Remember, we're not going to have any secrets, then!"

"No, you'll hear this first," Jack said with an odd smile. "You know, it doesn't matter how hard or how idiotic a thing is, Edith," he resumed, "once you're sure it's the thing you have to do! I'm nearly twenty-eight, and I think I've learned more in the last three months about myself and life than I did in all my life before! You can do things and do things with a sort of half-feeling that—well, it doesn't matter much. And then it comes over you, like a flash, '*That's* what I ought to do!' and it's like waking up from a dream."

"Tell me what you are going to do Monday night," Edith, who had not been listening, coaxed him babyishly.

Jack's thoughts rushed to it. He was turning into Old Mill Lane, he was asking Cecy if Rose was at home. Or perhaps it would be Rose herself who came to the side door——

He gave a short, excited laugh, and Edith thought that he was laughing at her, and became more babyish and more coaxing.

"No, but really, I don't think that's very nice of you, Jack," she pouted, a little affronted. "I don't care what you do Monday. I'm not going to be one of these wives who want to pry into everything you do! But I *do* think—and especially after we're married——"

"When'll you be nineteen, Edith?" he interrupted, absently.

"In April. Why? Has it anything to do with my birthday?" she asked, curiously.

"You know you told me at Fallen Leaf that you'd not marry until you were at least twenty-five," Jack teased her.

She was on the arm of his chair, almost in his arms. Now she turned slightly surprised and somewhat suspicious brown eyes to his.

"Yes, but that was before—— I don't see what that has to do with it," she protested, disapprovingly.

"Why, I was just thinking that we have seven years to wait!" Jack said. "Before we have to tell each other all our secrets!"

"I think that is a silly way to talk!" Edith said, coldly, getting up and walking proudly away. Jack laughed good-humouredly as he went after her. The burning hunger he was beginning to experience for that first talk with Rosalind was rapidly blotting everything else from his life.

Formally as it had been recognized, cordially as it had been received, he had not for his engagement to Edith anything of the feeling that had made the break with Rosalind so difficult. That had been tearing into

the fibres of something that for all its impracticability had been sacred. This was—well, this was just what girls and men meant when they said casually:

"He and Edith Rogers were engaged once, you know!"

He had been a fool. Confused and vague as was his plan at present, he saw that now. Everything sane and logical pointed to his marriage with Edith, nothing could be more frankly idiotic than, having broken with Rosalind, to break now with Edith and return to the first allegiance again.

But then logic did not matter, expediency did not matter. What mattered was that he felt nettled and confused and hurried in all these new relationships that his mother and Edith were so charmingly cementing, and that the mere thought of Rose made his heart sing, and his blood run normally, cleared his brain, and, paradox though it might seem, cleared the future again. He could be anywhere, do any work, face any difficulties—with Rose. He could not do anything, fettered and cuddled in the cotton wool of the decorous and the expected thing.

His mother and Edith, he began to suspect, treated him like a child or a fool. Everything else, in connection with the engagement, was supremely important to them: the cups, the gowns, the relatives, the new house, the notes, and the entertaining. He was just the prospective husband, to be kept amused and quiet, and made to play his extremely insignificant part.

Well, whatever happened Monday night, there must come a change. Edith should break this engagement herself, make any explanation she pleased to the world,

and go East again this winter to visit those precious Davenports of whom she talked so much—she had more than once playfully accused him of spoiling her brilliant prospects with Bill Davenport—and this queer little interlude of their engagement——

"Lord, it certainly puts me in a manly, resolute sort of light," Jack mused. "But what do I care!"

He could not wait until Monday. He would go to find Rosalind on Sunday afternoon. Edith was going with her family to her Uncle George's house in Marysville on Sunday. She had prettily offered Jack his freedom for that afternoon.

"It's very stupid and you've been once. And your mother does like to have you drive her about on Sundays," Edith had said. But she had prettily reverted to the subject of Monday. "Is that Monday engagement very important, Jack?" she had asked. "Because I'm afraid I've very stupidly promised Sally that we'd come over and play bridge. I *could* break it, I suppose. But—is it business Monday?"

Jack's heart had been dancing. He would see Rosalind late on Sunday—day after to-morrow!

"Nope. I can break the Monday date," he had said, good-naturedly.

Edith had been radiant. The secret, whatever it was, was made harmless, and Jack would be driving his mother about Gates Mill on Sunday afternoon and join the Rogerses, of course, for the usual cold supper at seven.

Thus it happened that on the very October Sunday when Rose, the lunch dishes washed after the midday dinner, was staring apathetically out into the side yard, wondering whether to put a good two hours in

on her French or to make the almost unthinkable effort of walking with Mom and Audrey to the graveyard, Jack, half a mile away, was whistling as he dressed to come and see her.

"I think Sunday afternoon is the most horrible time of the whole week!" Rose told Cecy, sombrely.

"Oh, I don't!" Cecy said, quickly. She and another youthful pair and Dory Barker were going driving up the Poorhouse Road to Kirby's Dam presently in Dory's disreputable car.

All Gates Mill would be driving in that direction in the mellow autumn afternoon. The sharp evening dampness would be lying on the hot dust when they came home, and the sinking sunlight strained through the first heavy dews that lay in a misty band close to the earth, like a creamy blanket over the garnered shocks and the bare vines and the golden pumpkins. The air would be sweet with Indian grass and drying prunes and grapes and the pungent aromatic odour of the dust. And all Gates Mill would see little Cecy Kirby on the front seat of Dory Barker's car. They would have caramels to chew and they would sing as the car rocked comfortably around the turns and past the flashing windows of the Poorhouse.

"Ned," Rosalind began, as her brother lounged into the clean kitchen and, half-an-hour after the heavy dinner, commenced to cut himself great chunks of bread. "Want to walk with Mom and me to the cemetery?"

"Aw, what's the use?" Ned asked, amiably and idly, sprawling over the table as he ate his bread.

"Well, what *are* you going to do?" Rosalind demanded

"Oh—nothing, I guess," Ned yawned. "Go to the Royal with Grandpa, maybe," he added.

"You were at a movie last night!"

"Yes, I know," Ned laughed with the air of being too smart for her. "But it changes to-day!"

"I was thinking we might hire old Clown and the surrey and drive," Mrs. Kirby, who was actually embarrassed by a sense of financial ease in these days, suggested mildly. She had come into the kitchen and was looking a little anxiously at her beautiful oldest child. "Seems as if we might, your one free day, Rose," she added, timidly "Ingles only charges a dollar an hour, and we could ask Miss Ellie. Your grandfather wouldn't go, I know, but he went out after lunch, and I don't know where he is."

"Dibs on the front seat with Rose!" shrilled Audrey, who had followed her brother's example and was eating bread and butter ravenously.

Rose, who in her general metamorphosis had recently entered upon a patient, almost saintly, phase, infinitely more comforting to her family than the recent mood of criticism and capability, wiped the crumb-strewn table gently, and put away the butchered loaf.

"That would be lovely," she agreed, lifelessly.

Audrey immediately departed, screaming, for Ingles Stables around the corner, and presently came bouncing back in the surrey with Jim Ingles smoking a large black cigar on the front seat beside her, and Clown large and frisky between the shafts.

Miss Ellie, murmuring over and over again, "Well, I declare this is *kind!*" was tenderly helped into the back seat, Mrs. Kirby took her seat beside her, after carefully depositing a great bunch of cosmos under

the back seat, for disposition upon the beloved graves, and Rose took the reins.

"Come with us, Ned?" his sister asked. No, thanks, he'd rather not, he said, hurting her vaguely and clouding his mother's eyes. What was the difference? Rosalind asked herself. Let him go the way of all the town boys, if he would.

As they drove, observant and admiring, through the beautiful, peaceful district of Upper River Street, twenty minutes later, with Miss Ellie estimating that it was 'most two years since she had been driving up this way, and Mrs. Kirby pointing out every separate inch that the Kirby and Tallifer families had once owned, they passed Jack Talbot in his gray car.

Rosalind, whose eyes and thoughts were far away, did not see him, nor did Audrey, and if the others did, they gave no sign. The horse's hoofs clopped by steadily, the tan fringe of the canopy gently shook and shook and shook above their heads.

But Jack saw them, and his heart turned to water. He had been making straight for Old Mill Lane. The world seemed cold and unfriendly as he slowed the gray car, irresolutely followed the course of River Street, and turned back.

"Home again?" his mother's voice called pleasantly through the quiet of the Sunday afternoon.

"Yep. Where are you?"

"Out on the porch. Well, your errand didn't take you very long, ducky. Wasn't Bozzy at home?"

"I didn't go in."

"Oh, I thought you and Bozzy were going to talk about the new Country Club?"

"Well, I thought we might. But I decided to come home again!"

"I see. Come out here with me. Your father thought that something had disagreed with him and went upstairs to lie down. I gave him some soda. He had that late, heavy breakfast, and I think luncheon was pretty hearty. Missing Edith?"

Jack did not answer. He caught a section of the scattered Sunday newspaper from the floor and sank into a basket chair. It was just four o'clock.

They probably had hired the surrey from half-past three to half-past five. And he must be at the Rogerses' at seven. He would go to the Kirbys' at a little before six, make some excuse to his mother, and have just the beginning of his talk with Rosalind—just an honest fifteen minutes that should start to loosen the flood gates——

He dozed off on that happy dream of himself in Old Mill Lane. Rosalind coming to the door——

His mother half-roused him, gathering up papers. She carried the rustling sheets away, and he heard her say to 'Gusta: "Is Mr. Talbot awake, do you know?"

Then silence, and the drowsy sweetness of the October afternoon again, and the far hum of the interurban trolley spinning through the fields. A humming bird came and poised itself over a passion flower, jerked to another and poised throbbing yet motionless again. Jack's eyes followed it idly.

Suddenly and hideously the hour of peace was shattered by a scream. For a moment his senses could not place it or its direction; he started up in confused horror. Then came the always frightening sound of running

footsteps upon an upper floor, and the words, in his mother's voice, although not a voice he had ever heard from her before:

"Oh, my God—Augusta! Oh, Wittinger—Wittinger ——! Oh, my God—quick—quick—quick! Jack——Jack—*Jack!*"

He was flying, rushing, his breath gone, his heart hammering in his throat——

He was on the stairs—he had caught his half-fainting mother in his arms—he was in his father's bedroom——

"It was—it was a man, Jack!" his father was saying, thickly. Jack lifted the big form from where it was half-sitting, half-lying, on the floor. His father's eyes were bloodshot, his face had a dark, unwholesome colour, he looked dazed.

"Get him into bed—call Newman!" Jack muttered between his teeth, his hands working madly over the prostrate form. "Call Newman, 'Gusta, don't stand there crying! He's all right, Mother, he's just had a fall——"

"Man at the window!" old Talbot said, distinctly and loudly, over the murmuring and whimpering in the room.

"Help me get him into bed," Jack directed. "He must have had a fall——"

"My head——" his father said.

"Oh, Jack—he'll die before Newman gets here!" sobbed Mrs. Talbot. "Oh, my God, what can we do? Oh, Wittinger, Wittinger—Jack, do you want a hot-water bottle? 'Gusta, *fly*—fly and get a hot-water bottle!"

"Ice-pack more like it!" Jack said, not moving his eyes from his father's congested face as he buttoned

the red-piped old-fashioned nightshirt below the bearded chin.

Newman, coming hurriedly in in his golf clothes, said that the ice-pack had been right; everything had been quite right. It was just a touch of vertigo—nothing serious.

"But I think we will keep this young man where he is for a day or two," decided the doctor, comfortably. "Little rest won't hurt you, Mr. Talbot!"

"Damn nonsense!" growled J. Wittinger, amiably.

"Oh, look here now," said the doctor, "I haven't got a real good fee out of you folks for years!"

But downstairs he was not so cheerful. He said frankly that he did not like the look in J. Wittinger's eyes, there were aspects of paralysis——

And that was the end of Jack Talbot's long boyhood. The week that followed was like a hideous dream of responsibility and care; his father had a long talk with Bainbridge on Monday, the beginning of the end.

Jack protested to the doctor against the advisability of this talk. "There's nothing the *matter* with him," he said.

"I'd let him talk to Bainbridge, Jack, and see Purcell, if he wants to," Newman said, quietly.

"My Lord, can't the Works run five minutes without Dad?" Jack demanded, impatiently. But the second name arrested him suddenly. Purcell was his father's lawyer. "What do you mean, Doc?" he asked in a lower tone, paling.

Newman shrugged. But old J. Wittinger had his long talk with Bainbridge, and the next morning his wife and Jack were summoned in for a business conference.

The invalid looked quiet, and at peace, although there was a mottled, heavy colour in his face, and his hands seemed curiously lifeless. Bainbridge did most of the talking.

Mr. Talbot wanted to take advantage of this scare to clear things up. He expected to be around again in a few days, but meanwhile this seemed a good time to decide upon the incorporation of the Works, as he had always planned. He meant to take a good long holiday now, and put Jack in his place.

"A heavy load for a boy, my son, but you'll grow to it," he said. He and his wife would travel—the boy must take the whole responsibility. Fifty-one per cent. of the stock went to Jack, twenty-five to his mother. "Be good to your mother, Jack!" the old man said, in a troubled, puzzled sort of tone.

Mrs. Talbot began to cry; Newman gave the invalid something to drink and said that he didn't propose to listen to any of that sort of talk.

Fifty-one per cent. of the stock to the boy, twenty-five to his mother. Old Leahy was to have two shares, and Paul Long, the oldest employee in the place, another two in recognition of faithful service. The remaining twenty shares went as a gift to Clyde Bainbridge, who was to remain as third stockholder, second vice-president, and manager of the Iron Works. Both wife and son looked amazed at this mention of the manager's name. Had Bainbridge made himself so valuable?

"Satisfactory to you, Lila?" asked the sick man.

"Wittinger, of *course* it is! I'm—I suppose I don't quite understand your *giving* Mr. Bainbridge so much stock! Of course, you know best. But—but why are we talking like this?" his wife demanded, pathetically.

"All right as far as you're concerned, my boy?"

"My God, Dad," said Jack, his freckles showing up strongly upon his paling face. "You're—you're the one to run it, and all of us!"

"Well, you draw that all up, Purcell, and bring it to me," said J. Wittinger, wearily. He clasped his wife's hands, and closed his eyes.

The next day, and the next, he was brighter, and even on Saturday the *Republican* could confidently assert: "Local Iron King Convalescent. J. Wittinger Talbot Recovering After Severe Illness." But Newman made no promises, and a week to the hour after his first attack, the soul of his patient quietly left the big airy bedroom in Upper River Street, and the tree-shaded neighbourhood upon which a quiet autumn rain was falling, and the town where he had struggled and conquered for fifty of his sixty-eight years.

The news went about Gates Mill like a sobering wind. Old Talbot was dead. Funny to think of the town without old Talbot.

And Bainbridge now was the most important person in the Iron Works; Jack could be the figurehead, of course, but somebody had to do the hard, responsible, experienced managing, and it must be Bainbridge. The Iron Works was going to be incorporated, and although Jack was to be president, Bainbridge was to be vice-president and general manager and would have everything his own way. It was no secret that the two young men had no special liking for each other.

Jack's mother had collapsed. There was an appalling amount of work for him to do, questions to settle on all sides. Even before his father's funeral the boy had bitterly reproached himself for all the wasted years when

he might have grasped the details of the business and had not done so.

And when the funeral was over and he had to spend day after day struggling with business matters made absolutely incomprehensible by his lack of experience and knowledge, and had to return at night to the desolate and demoralized household that was always echoing to his mother's forlorn wails, he felt as if not only his father's responsibilities, but his father's years, had descended upon his head.

Old Rogers of the Bank was one of the trustees. Jack had to see him almost every day; sometimes he dined at the Rogerses', and instead of laughing and murmuring over the piano with Edith, spent long hours in her father's library, talking, computing, making tentative decisions.

No more time for dreams! His dream of Old Mill Lane, of a romantic love and renunciation, came to him no more. He was always worried, always tired. Rosalind had gone out of his life with everything else that was young and irresponsible and joyous; there was never a moment when he could with propriety introduce her name. His mother clung to him, Edith, her father, the entire personnel of the Works—all, all looked to him now to be their unpaid, harassed slave. He was no longer free to go his own way, to live his own life.

"Does Mr. Bainbridge really try to make it easier for you?" Edith demanded.

"Oh, he's awfully decent. He hasn't much magnetism, you know. But he's a marvel when it comes to business! It'll be Talbot and Bainbridge, some day, if I don't hustle!"

"Never!" said Edith, her face flaming.

"God forbid!" said his mother, leaning back with shut eyes in her chair, her face pallid above the heavy black of her gown.

He must be his mother's comfort. He must take his father's position in the community. He was engaged to a lovely girl, he must marry and settle down and re-establish the Talbot family. They all—lawyer, judge, clergyman, doctor, bankers—reminded him of it over and over. His life, his work, was cut out for him. It was a big work. But he had chosen wisely in his promised wife, and he had grasped the colossal problem of the business manfully. Gates Mill was watching him attentively, expectantly. Everybody was back of him, he had everyone's sympathy and goodwill.

"No more time for nonsense, Jack!" said Judge Raymond. "You've had your days of dancing with the girls and running round town with this one and that one! Now you've got to make good."

Only Jack knew how difficult of fulfillment this last clause promised to be. At the Works, he had to depend utterly upon Bainbridge, and upon the general trust and friendliness that the various heads of departments showed to Bainbridge. There was hardly a letter that Jack felt free to answer without consulting the manager, and his face would burn when Bainbridge quietly set right his errors and cancelled his mistaken orders.

Jack felt superfluous, ridiculous, in his father's office, and he found the days inexpressibly tiring as he stumbled and hesitated along the new road, excluded from this conference, made helpless at that, and politely and resolutely reduced to a cipher on all sides.

It was the more exhausting because Edith and his mother were totally unable to comprehend it, even in the slightest degree. His mother said that he was already a better business man than his poor father, because darling Wittinger had worried so, and Edith praised him "for just walking in there and showing them all that you know more than the whole bunch of them!"

"Why don't you just fire Brainbridge, Jack?" both of them demanded calmly, upon an occasion when an apologetic telephone from Bainbridge had revealed to them that he had usurped Jack's authority completely.

"Maybe he'll fire me, first!" Jack said, wearily, in answer.

"Fire you!" his mother said, quickly. "With fifty-one per cent. of the stock! You could laugh in his face."

"Yes, dear, and he could sell his stock, and walk out, and laugh in mine!" said Jack.

"But, Jackie dear! You're a Talbot—you're president of the Works!" his mother persisted, anxious and puzzled.

"All right, Mother. And it's all going to work out!" Jack said, almost falling asleep with weariness as he lay upon the sitting-room couch.

CHAPTER XI

THREE weeks after his father's death Edith delayed Jack a minute as he was following her own father into the library at the Rogerses' house.

"Jack, dear, I've been talking to Mamma. Of course, it'll all have to be very quiet now, because of the family being in mourning. But would December eleventh be right for you? That's three weeks from Thursday. Of course, I've given up all my plans, I'll not have any bridesmaids or anything. We'll just have a very simple ceremony at noon, and a breakfast here, and ask only the members of the immediate families," said Edith, dropping easily into the newspaper phrases as she thought it out.

"You mean our getting married?" he asked, slowly, after a pause.

"You see that gives us Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, for a little trip and you're back in the Works Monday," Edith explained, practically. "Your mother'll be much happier, it worries me to think of her alone in that big house, and everyone says—Uncle George, and papa, and the Judge, and everybody—that we ought not to put it off!"

"You know, I've been thinking about every other darned thing," Jack began, apologetically.

"Of course you have, you poor overburdened boy!"

"The eleventh, did you say?"

"Yes, that's three weeks from Thursday."

"Sure, that suits me."

"That's fine then," said Edith, simply, in satisfaction.

It was not that Edith was at all insensitive, was in the least unwomanly or bold. Not Edith! Jack thought, as he brought his buzzing head to something like concentration upon assets and liabilities again. No, she was extremely young, extraordinarily practical, and, having once become engaged to her, he had accomplished all she asked of him in the matter of their marriage. The details were hers to arrange.

Evidently her entire family and circle were advising an early and quiet marriage, and why not? Jack had had a slight inkling of one of the motives that actuated Edith one evening when to his mother's: "I was married at eighteen," Edith had responded quickly, "I will be, too!"

She was very attractive, always trim and beautifully dressed, always adequate. Their friends and ideals and standards were the same; the Rogerses and the Talbots had had adjoining pews in St. Luke's since St. Luke's was built. A man was much wiser to select a woman who could never surprise him with her ignorance of his world, who would take her place at once in church, in club, in the town's social life, and succeed, as Mrs. John Rossiter Talbot, to the place now filled by Mrs. J. Wittinger Talbot.

Jack, thinking of these things, felt old and quiet and sensible. It was all a web, he could not escape it. It all fitted together: the bewildering hours at the Iron Works, when he must see Clyde Bainbridge enjoying his birthright of authority and control; his mother's innocent arrogance, her confidence that there always had been plenty of money, and that Jack had only to

report at the Works every morning at nine and come punctually home at five to have everything eternally prosperous; and Edith pleasantly, happily planning their marriage. The two big rooms at the back of the house were being papered for their occupancy, Edith's father was Jack's best adviser, and finally, the *Republican* had duly announced that "owing to the recent death of the groom's father, only the members of the immediate families would be present at the ceremony."

"I've got the funniest feeling, Doc," Jack confided to the family physician, a few days before the wedding, when he delayed Newman's car in River Street, outside of the Bank, for a few minutes, "I can't see myself with a wife—my God, I've got enough on my shoulders now! What I'm thinking about is that the steel castings we've been using since the middle of September are full of blow holes—the firm that's been supplying them has failed, but that doesn't mean anything to our customers! We're way behind on deliveries, and collections are rotten. Bainbridge wants to cut down the territory of the San Francisco agency and put one in Sacramento—says he's got a man there that will double our orders, but old Long was telling me yesterday that this Sacramento man doesn't know a damned thing! And then when I think of the whole thing going to smash, maybe, and myself with my mother and a wife—— And Edith's a darned sweet little girl, I wouldn't want——"

"Aw, everybody feels like that when they get married!" the doctor, who had himself a young wife and a new baby, said with a fraternal grin. "I guess a hundred fellows have talked to me like that just before they were married! Don't you worry, the Iron Works

is as solid as it ever was; you're just kind of worked up now because it's all so strange to you, you've had to get it all at once! Bainbridge is a fine fellow; you're lucky to have him in there, and in a few years you and the Missis will be on Easy Street. Get married, Jack, and settle down, and have a kid, and you'll feel differently about everything! You love Edith, and that part's all right," went on Newman, "but besides all that, it isn't as if her people had nothing, you know. Your mother's crazy about her, and her father's president of the Bank, and there's his fine home, and the camp at the lake, and all that—those things make a difference!"

"You know I was remembering that a couple of the fellows at college were sent for to come home," Jack said, youthfully. "Their fathers died, and there was business to settle up, and I used to think it would be a sort of exciting time—Prince of Wales stuff, you know—everybody looking at you, and so on! But, my God," he added, tears suddenly coming into his eyes, "if I could bring the old man back! Nowadays nothing seems normal—I don't know how to express it! I feel as if the twenty-a-week clerks in Bond's had a better show than I have!"

"That'll all wear off," predicted the doctor, comfortably. "Ever see Rose Kirby these days?" he asked, shrewdly.

Jack's face flushed.

"I haven't seen her for months," he said, slowly. "Four months. Except for a minute in old Terry's office."

"That was pretty serious while it lasted, eh?"

"You bet your life it was serious."

"She was at the concert last night," Newman added.

"She *is* beautiful! Lovely face—looks as if she had a lovely nature, too."

"She has," Jack said, briefly. But the mention of her name did not stir him as it had done in those dreaming, romantic days before his father's death. He felt now only a sort of reminiscent heartache, a shame that was mixed with quiet regret.

"Well, we all do it!" the doctor said, cheerfully. "'Member the girl I was so mad about—Gerty Bell—the boys used to call her 'Liberty' Bell? Her father had a saloon in Castro Street in those palmy days. She won a beauty contest in a San Francisco paper, and was sent around the world, and married an army officer and shot him through the lungs—that was all *she* did! Well, buck up, Jack—you've got to grow up like the rest of us, you know!"

"I was thinking maybe I'd go down and see Rose and just have a talk with her," Jack, who had not been listening, said thoughtfully.

"Don't she work at the Iron Works?"

"Not any more. She's gone over to Terry."

"I heard Bozzy Terry was crazy about the younger girl," the doctor, advancing his spark-lever idly, said thoughtfully.

"Cecy? But what do you think of my going to see Rose?"

"We-ell," Newman drawled, doubtfully. "Point is, when could you do it? The big hawk lights day after to-morrow, you know!"

Jack frowned, reflecting. It seemed incredible, now that he suddenly wanted to see Rose, that he was too tightly caught to plan even for an hour of freedom.

"I could go just before dinner to-night," he suggested, after thought.

"Why not go over to the flour mills, just casually, and see her there?"

"Why—why, you couldn't—talk, exactly—in Terry's outer office!"

Newman gave him a speculative glance.

"Depends upon what you have to say," he said, drily. "Here's the thing, Jack, everybody in town knows you and your car. You park it outside Rose Kirby's house to-night, and you'll have the whole town buzzing—and what *for?* It'll make Edith mad, and I won't blame her. You know, there's an awful lot of happiness in marriage, my boy, but there's responsibility, too. You've got Edith to think of now, and her feelings, and her mother and all her folks—that's all a part of it!"

"Oh, Lord, that's just what I'm telling you!" Jack said, soberly, almost with a groan.

CHAPTER XII

YOUNG Mr. and Mrs. John Rossiter Talbot returned from their brief honeymoon on the Tuesday afternoon following their wedding, and took possession at once of the pretty suite of rooms that had been prepared for them in the old Talbot mansion in Upper River Street. The groom's mother met them with smiles that quivered immediately into tears, and there was a large family dinner that night at the Rogerses' house.

Jack, nervous and apologetic over the unexpected forty-eight hours' delay in his return, had planned to call up his manager that evening. He and Edith had reached Del Monte on Saturday morning, but all that day and the next had been quiet, foggy, silent, and the bride had pleaded for just one bright sunshiny day. The bright sunshiny day had been Monday, and it was only by travelling hard all day that they managed to reach home on Tuesday, in the early winter darkness.

But Mrs. Rogers had thoughtfully forestalled this by asking Mr. Bainbridge to dinner, and Bainbridge was reassuring and pleasant.

"We didn't expect you back all this week," he assured Jack, good-naturedly. Edith, tired as she was, turned the battery of her pretty wifely charm upon him, engaging him, with youthful dignity, to dine with them immediately, and assuring him, with a kindliness that made Jack turn red to the roots of his hair, that if anything had gone wrong at the Works in Jack's ab-

sence, Mr. Bainbridge might be very sure that she, Edith, and not either of the men, was really to blame!

This was on Tuesday, and it was on the following Sunday that Jack and Edith, sauntering toward the Talbot gates to cross the street and turn the corner, and so find themselves at the Terry house, for idle talk, picture puzzles, bridge, tea, or perhaps a walk, saw Clyde Bainbridge driving his car slowly along Upper River Street.

Winter was upon Gates Mill now, and most of the trees were bare, but rusty clusters of brown and yellow scimitars still clung to the peeling white shafts of the eucalyptus, and the cedars and evergreens kept their bulky shape. The ground was sodden underfoot, and heavily padded with dead leaves; the thin, sharp air was scented with chrysanthemums.

The houses of Upper River Street, like aristocrats driven by poverty to strange revelations, could see each others' windows now: upper porches, stretches of bared drive. Jack and Edith could look through opened spaces of fences and stone walls at tennis courts stripped and holding shallow pools, the Barkers' circular clothes-pole, the Pearsalls' rusty white horse with his head over a fence rail.

The cool, windless, sunless day was silent, dreaming, brooding. The Talbots' windmill wheel did not move, doves walked and twisted busily on the barn roof, but made no sound; a great cock in the Rogerses' chicken yard scraped the earth with his spread wing, and uttered a belligerent "P'tock tock!", but he did not crow. Smoke rose from chimneys, straight and lifeless into the lifeless air. All the life of the world was indoors today.

"That's Mr. Bainbridge's car, isn't it?" Edith asked. "Don't let him see us! He may be calling, and we'd have to go back!"

But the motor car gave no sign of stopping, and as it approached it was to be seen that the occupants were deep in talk and paying small attention to their progress or their surroundings.

Clyde Bainbridge was at the wheel; his companion was Rose Kirby.

She had a big soft brown coat on—given Ellie Kane years ago by old Mrs. Terry and borrowed to-day, but that mattered not. It had a brown fur collar which framed the glowing colour of her exquisite face, her hat was small and brown and there was a single rose upon it that matched her cheeks. The blue eyes were fixed amusedly upon her companion, her burned-gold hair spread itself in little tendrils against the upturned brim of the hat, and its rich waves completely hid her ears. She was interested; she measured something small and square with her two gloved hands, and Edith and Jack were actually near enough to hear her say eagerly: "Oh, Mr. Bainbridge, but how do they *know* that?"

"Isn't that——?" Edith asked, when they passed, stopping short.

"Yes. That's Rose Kirby!" Jack said, briefly.

"Jack, isn't she *extremely* pretty!"

"She looked pretty, all right, to-day!"

"But how oddly you say that, dear!" Edith smiled.

"Come on, honey," Jack said, following the path into the Terry's side yard, whose brick fence had concealed them.

"No, but I think I have the right to ask for an explanation of that tone, Jack," Edith said, lightly.

"What tone, dear?"

"Why, the tone in which you said that she looked pretty *to-day*. Doesn't she always, or is it that you don't admire her type any more?"

"It's neither," Jack said, good-naturedly. "I didn't know you were so interested, that was all. Bainbridge looked quite the Adonis, didn't he, in that new coat? He's handsome, that guy."

"Interested?" Edith echoed, patiently. "Why *shouldn't* I be interested? After all, Mr. Bainbridge is the junior partner in the Works, since your father chose to make him so. My father says he never will understand why that stock should simply have been handed Bainbridge—for nothing! Father says that if your father wanted to incorporate there are lots of men in town who would have been glad enough to come in—to act as directors merely and leave you a freer hand. He says Judge Raymond and he would have been perfectly delighted to buy up that stock. But you don't like me to-day—I can see that!"

"If you can see that, you're a born reporter!" Jack assured her, laughing. A sudden interruption was welcome to him; someone was calling his name.

"It's old Mr. Tallifer!" said Edith, turning back to the street where Rose's magnificent grandfather, scrupulously brushed, and with his milky beard streaming over his big chest, was smiling and signalling to them. The old man often wandered harmlessly about the Upper River Street district on Sunday afternoons, getting a kindly greeting from everyone who met him and sometimes regaling small girls, or children with their nurses, with long tales of the past grandeurs of the town.

"You're Talbot's boy, ain't you?" he asked Jack now, with a smile from bright, frosty-blue eyes.

"Yes, sir," Jack answered, respectfully.

"Heard your father was ill?" old Tallifer asked, concernedly.

"Very ill," Edith answered, sweetly and gravely.

"Sorry to hear it—sorry to hear it! He hasn't got that extry volume of my Encyclopædia Britannica—the fourth volume, has he, Si? No, you aren't Si; you're Si's boy," the old man muttered, distressed at his own mental confusion.

"I'm Jack. No, sir, he hasn't got it," Jack, who knew all about this lost volume, said. "You know that was burned in the big fire, years ago."

"Burned, everything burned!" said Nathaniel Tallifer, cheerfully nodding. "Well, you tell your father to sell that stallion—once a feller like that gets to bolting, he's good for nothing but crow's meat," he added, going upon his gentle way.

"I will!" Jack assured him. "You were sweet with that poor old fellow, Edith," he hastened to say, affectionately approving.

"Well, I always feel so sorry for any one who is unfortunate like that," Edith admitted, moving along beside him and looking especially well in her pretty brown oxfords, her smart woollen stockings, her brief plaid skirt and the gay sweater that allowed a snowy frill of shirtwaist to escape. But she reverted to his secret dismay to the previous topic. "Jack, I do think that one reason why we are so happy and that our marriage is such a success," Edith began reasonably, "is that when we have even the faintest cause for an explanation, we face it sensibly and clear it up *then*. And let's always

do that, shall we? It's the only way. And when you turn on me, as you did, and say that you don't see why I should be interested in Rose Kirby, why you make me feel that you *totally* misunderstand me! Really, you do. In the first place, you admired her very much once, and that's enough to make me interested in her; and in the second place, if Clyde Bainbridge is paying attention to her," Edith added in a voice that was suddenly and surprisingly almost angry in its heat, "I think it's perfectly ridiculous!"

He was trying to be merely neutral, to be amused. But when Edith got into this logical, analytical mood she did have the most extraordinary fashion of boring him to exasperation. Why should he get angry if a girl of eighteen chose to ramble along in a fashion that was purely ignorant and purely imaginary? What was it to him if she expressed herself positively and fully about the business and Bainbridge and a lot of other things that she did not in the least understand? Her father had the same asinine positiveness, and he owned a bank and stood pretty well before the world. This girl was sweet and capable and a good sport, clean and straight, and she loved him and had been his wife for ten days.

"I don't see why ridiculous," he could not seem to help saying mildly. And he added a honeymoon name that she had said that she liked from him: "Pussy."

"Please don't spoil that name by using it when you are out of sympathy with me, Jack!" she said, quickly.

"Are we out of sympathy?" he asked, in a tone of mild surprise. What else was there to say? something inside him questioned. Was it *always* better just to keep still?

"Clyde Bainbridge would no more marry that girl than fly!" Edith said, irritably.

"*She* wouldn't marry *him!*" This at least came spontaneously from Jack, with his neither pausing nor wanting to pause to consider it.

"She? She'd jump at him!" Edith said, with a brief laugh, walking on. Jack did not speak.

"And he'd find himself saddled with that entire family, and he's too ambitious for that!" Edith concluded the subject with satisfaction. Immediately later she crossed the Terrys' porch and they were no longer alone.

Edith, before the others, was her charming self again. She was full of little endearments for Jack, really amusing and delightful in her attitude as the bride.

"I'll have to ask my husband, Bozzy. We young married women can't be too careful, you know. Jack, may I be Bozzy's partner?"

"Not if I'm to pay your losses," said Jack.

"Oh, listen to him! How mercenary! Do you mean that you could possibly let me be any other man's partner even for bridge?"

"Not without cutting his throat, of course!"

"Well, I should hope so! He's still loyal to me, Sally," said Edith, with a wise, droll little air of youthful pride. "I'm going to write an article: 'How to Keep Your Husband.'"

That was not mere acting, Jack realized. The truth was that Edith was really a child, spoiled, egotistical, self-centred, superficial. She liked her riding habit better than actual riding, her picture at the piano better than music, her new name and estate better than her husband. He had discovered on their very honeymoon

that he could always restore her equilibrium, when the storm about the torn cuff or the lost hat was over, by recalling her attention to herself.

She had questioned him like a curious child all during the wedding trip. How much had he tipped the waiter? Why had he gone to the St. Francis? But if he liked the Fairmont just as well, why hadn't they gone to the Fairmont? What had kept him so long downstairs? Well, but if all those men were waiting to be shaved, why hadn't he come up to her again? "Why did you say that, Jack? What are you thinking about?" she would ask.

But these were trifles, only a revelation to him of how extremely young, how childishly jealous, curious, persistent a girl could be at eighteen. What struck him seriously and forcefully in this very beginning of their life together was that Edith was absolutely devoid of affection.

Even in their hours alone she could show none of it, because, Jack saw, she had none to show. She liked breakfast in their room because of her pretty robes, her blue slippers, her boudoir caps. She clung prettily to his arm as they crossed the big porches on their way to beach or links, but at the same time she would say delightedly: "Everybody is identifying us! Isn't this too funny?"

She would take any amount of petting, of praising, and would revel in it like a happy little Persian kitten. But even when she spoke of her mother, her sisters and brothers, it was with a feeling only reflective of their own.

"Amy thinks everything I do is perfect," she would say of her sister-in-law. Or, "I felt worst for Mamma,

leaving home. I've always been her favourite, and Dorothy and Gracie are such selfish little pigs!"

She was pleased with her new calling cards, and she seized the chance of being in San Francisco on the very day after her marriage to open an account for Mrs. John R. Talbot of Gates Mill at the biggest shop in the city. That the clerk had asked her if she was Mrs. Talbot's daughter amused her highly, and she spoke of it a dozen times.

Happy, healthy, smothered in gifts, and with her trunks filled with pretty things, it was not astonishing that she was in constant high spirits and interested and sweet-tempered about everything. She gave Jack the full measure of her devotion, inasmuch as she could feel devotion at all. She would come and sit in his lap in her bridal fineries—a slim, boyish, undeveloped little person, with her dark hair hanging in a braid that ended with a somewhat reluctant curl and her face either framed by the beribboned cap or with a great bow of pink or yellow satin—she assured him decidedly that she could not wear blue or green, or any shade of orange or lavender—tied through her hair and flaring above one temple.

Her hands and voice and eyes were cool and youthful, sometimes golf or hard riding or walking brought an uncertain colour to her also cool and youthful cheeks, but she was usually pale. Hands and neck, however, browned nicely; she showed none of the golden freckles that powdered the straight bridge of Rose's warm little nose, nor did her wide-open, bright brown eyes ever give off sapphire sparkles.

She liked Jack thoroughly, and she had certain boyish little ways of showing it; she would say, "You adorable

old ass!" when he ate hot cakes for breakfast, or she would ask coaxingly for Indian slippers or chocolates in the curio shop. "Please, husband!" And occasionally she would say, "Tell Edith, John!" in a throaty little authoritative fashion that made him laugh.

But this was hardly marriage, even if this had not been Edith at her nicest. The slightest opposition would metamorphose her into quite a different being; criticism surprised her almost as much as it antagonized her. Jack could hardly believe she was not joking when she would sulkily reiterate childish phrases like: "Well, if you don't like the way I've done my hair, why *should* I go driving with you?" or, "If you hate the book I happen to like, I certainly am not going to make a fuss over the candy you bring me!"

However, it was very agreeable to get into his gray car and tuck his little wife up snugly for the long run home, and they had both been in high spirits and in a happily sentimental mood, well satisfied with each other when they did so. Edith talked charmingly about future plans, and Jack was quite young enough to share with her the pride of being the young Talbots returning from their honeymoon to the town that was almost like a possession of theirs. She did not get tired or fussy, she ate ham and eggs in a little Sacramento restaurant as if they were all her heart or appetite desired, and she did not criticize her husband when the speedometer went up into the fifties as the winter day drew to a close.

She was a good little sport, he thought, and she would learn. Eighteen was pretty young, and the beginnings of married life were notoriously difficult. It would all work out finely——

But he noticed things in the family conversation that

night that struck him oddly; had he heard all this before? Perhaps he had, without fully noticing the significance of it.

Carrie, little Lily Rogers's coloured nurse, for example, in reminiscing about the wedding, spoke of "one of Miss Ede's tantrums." Edith's mother, laughing comfortably, rejoiced openly that "Edie had been turned over to someone who could manage her. Nobody in the family could!" Old Rogers, kissing his bride affectionately, said to Jack, in a fatherly aside, "Don't go too fast with her, my boy. She'll lead, but the devil himself couldn't drive her! Remember, she's hardly more than a child."

Then he was disturbed to hear Edith say to Clyde Bainbridge that they were "with Jack's mother—*for the present.* I don't know," Edith had said, "whether she'll turn the house over to us, or we will build eventually. But no house is big enough for two families—my mother says!"

Finally, came his own mother's kindly comment:

"She has the making of a fine woman, Jack, but at the same time Edith's headstrong, and she could be easily ruined. It'll depend on you, dear, whether she develops into the splendid wife she might be, or whether that childish stubbornness grows on her!"

"Has the making of a fine woman?" But his mother had always taken the tone that Edith was already a remarkable, a well-nigh perfect woman. Jack lay wakeful for a long time, that first night at home.

But the next day was sweet and sunshiny, and Edith was happy as a lark, and they talked plans for next summer at the Lake, and Jack got home early for some splendid tennis with her and decided that after all she

was going to be a wife far above the average, and that when they settled down and everything was a little bit straightened out he would begin to feel the solid earth under him again.

"'Gusta says she saw Mr. Bainbridge driving, to-day, in his car, with your old friend Rose Kirby," Jack's mother said on that same Sunday night.

"Yes, we saw them, too," Edith answered, shaking out her big fresh napkin.

"Well, don't you think that's very strange, Jackie?" asked his mother, surprised that it should be taken for granted.

"No," Edith said, quickly and lightly deprecating. "It doesn't mean anything with him."

"My gracious, that would be a funny turn of affairs," Mrs. Talbot pursued, anxiously. "I'd be sorry," she added, slowly.

"Yes, so would I!" Edith quickly agreed. "Rose Kirby doesn't look as if she'd ever been sick!" she went on with faint resentment.

"I never thought she was," Mrs. Talbot added, unguardedly.

Jack looked from one to the other.

"Has she been sick?" he asked. He was amazed to see that they both flushed, and that his mother tossed her head.

"I told you that, Jack," she said with an air of casualness, "or if I didn't it was because there was so much confusion just before the wedding, and after your poor father's going—it seemed to me we got a hundred messages a day!" Mrs. Talbot finished, sighing.

"Did she telephone?" Jack questioned, quietly.

"No—oh, no. Her mother did, and said—well, Rose

wasn't sick, but she wasn't very well! That was it. She was home a day or two, or something. I spoke to Edith about it," said Jack's mother, neatly involving her confederate with the phrase, "and why we didn't tell you or how it happened, I can't remember! It was only a few days before you were married. I suppose she had a little cold; they were epidemic all through November. But I knew it wasn't important," finished Mrs. Talbot, "for Rose could have telephoned you at the office at any time, she knew that. And then *just* before your wedding she would surely understand that you were terribly busy—with your poor father's affairs in such confusion, and all. You may clear, Lizzie," said Mrs. Talbot who had during this speech pressed the service bell beneath her foot. "Unless Miss Edith will have—oh, dear, there I go again, Edith! What *shall* I do to remember that I'm the dowager now! Have you finished, Jackie?"

"Quite," Jack assured her briefly and pleasantly. When they spoke again it was seriously and tenderly of J. Wittinger's monument, and Edith, with a charming little affectionate impulse not usual with her, stretched out her brown, thin hand and laid it upon Jack's.

"Mother, when Mrs. Kirby telephoned that day," Jack asked, the next morning, "did she leave any message from Rose?"

His mother looked thoughtful, helpful, sympathetic.

"No, dear," she answered, conscientiously, "and my *impression* was that Rose didn't know her mother was telephoning. But, Jackie, why don't you run up to the Mills, one of these days, at noon, and see her?" she suggested, kindly. "Tell her you did not get that message

until last night, because in the general change and hurry and confusion your bad mother entirely forgot it."

Very generous, now, he could not help thinking. Willing to be more than just to little Rose now.

"Perhaps I will; it's of no consequence!" he told his mother, kissing her punctiliously before he left for the office.

Unreal. Unreal. Unreal. Here was recently married Jack Talbot, rich, independent, and popular, young, healthy, and good-looking, going down in his handsome car to his office that had "President" on the door. But it was all so bafflingly unreal.

"Lord, to *wake up*, somehow!" he said out loud, in the quiet of the frost-bound winter day. "I don't know that I can keep this up indefinitely. I feel as if my brain was half alive, or something. I feel as if something was lacking somewhere!" And suddenly on the quiet air he seemed to hear a girl's voice saying restlessly, feverishly, passionately:

"You'll pay for this, Jack! I don't know how or when. But some day when there is something *you* are hungering for——"

He laughed again aloud, turning his car in at the big, blackened gate of the Iron Works, and returning the nods from the different men scattered about among the sheds and shops.

"I must be tired," he thought. "I'm doing a good deal—it won't last. Why, I have everything in the world! And besides," his thoughts ran, uneasily, "she didn't mean it. Not Rose!"

CHAPTER XIII

Gates Mill, like all California towns, had a distinct individuality and celebrated yearly a feast that was peculiarly its own. Up and down the big state, from February to October, went the circling festivals, the rodeos, the flower weeks, the pioneer carnivals, Indian medicine dances, blossom jubilees, the pageants and fiestas. The heritage of what was romantic and significant in the old days of the wandering tribes, of the Spanish padres and sheep ranchers, of the hoop-covered prairie wagons and the Orient with its shaking coloured lanterns and yawning paper dragons, was brought forth on these occasions, when whole communities made merry and rejoiced, and the spectacle of an entire town revelling in fancy dress, music, feasting, and song was one with which every young person in Gates Mill was entirely familiar.

When, in the course of events, it seemed good to the public-spirited citizens of Gates Mill to select a town birthday and decide upon a suitable fashion in which to keep it, the four warmest months were discovered to be filled to the brim with the already established celebrations of the neighbouring towns. With the Fourth of July, always sacred from invasion, and the Chautauqua, and the rodeos at Haywards and Salinas, and La Paloma's Flower Fête, and circuses here and there, it was thought advisable to select some other month than June, July, August, or September.

The city fathers of Gates Mill had therefore taken their weather-bureau statistics and their calendar in hand, and had ascertained that never in the sixty years during which observations had been made, had rain fallen upon their town upon May the seventeenth.

The week of May the seventeenth had been consequently chosen as a suitable time upon which Gates Mill might rejoice, and almost immediately afterward a black-faced, shrivelled old Spanish woman had been discovered in the local poorhouse, Señora Olracena, who in 1848 had sent forth her husband and five lusty brothers to rescue the first desolate pioneers who had ever made their way down, starving, footsore, and lost, through the encircling mountains.

The Señora was ninety by the lowest possible estimate, and she was as pleased as a child of six to find herself the centre of loyal Gates Mill's spring-time uproar. Through the activity of the Chamber of Commerce, the Lions Club, the Y. M. C. A., the Girls' Friendly, the Scouts, the Campfire Girls, and the Women's Improvement Society, she was removed from the asylum and placed in a small cottage with a fine strong young Spanish girl to care for her. The Señora kept running away to the asylum, when she was not muttering and smoking in a sinister manner close to the stove, and the young Spanish girl's conduct gave the town even more acute concern, but all this was forgotten every spring when the time came about for the birthday party, which Gates Mill called "Golden West Week."

One of the features of this hilarious week of blossoms, fragrance, gaiety, dancing, and song was a barbecue at Kirby's Dam followed by a dance on Saturday night. For the dance an enormous platform was built in Tallifer

Park, which was dotted with lanterns and gay with bunting for the occasion. And before the barbecue, the generous authorities asked that all loyal householders fill bathtubs, jars, and pitchers with water, that Gates Mill might plunge into the dam at its pleasure, and that the advertisements that were strewn all over the countryside might truthfully state: "Bathing. Boating. Fishing. Water Sports."

To ask a young woman to be his guest at the barbecue was a significant step for any young man to take. To ask her to the dance a few hours later was also a thought-provoking act. But to ask any girl to attend both in his company was tantamount to a proposal of marriage, and all the girls of Gates Mill knew it.

Consequently, Rosalind Kirby looked extremely thoughtful, in the spring following Jack Talbot's marriage, when her office mail brought her a note from the most eligible of the town bachelors begging for the honour of her company at the barbecue on the nineteenth of May, and further asking if he might escort her to the dance that night. It was signed Clyde Bainbridge.

She read the typewritten lines again; they were nicely expressed, but there was nothing formal, nothing alarming about it. It was simply the impromptu note of a busy man, rapped out on the office typewriter after hours perhaps, or perhaps he had a typewriter in that rather formidable-looking house of his above the old quarry.

At all events, it was not affected in tone—Rosalind and Clyde Bainbridge were good friends now. They liked each other. And, having long ago formed the impression that he was somewhat stiff and conventional

in type, Rosalind found herself now constantly obliged, and well pleased, to correct the idea.

"We are already deluged with Golden West Week propaganda," the note ran, "and it promises to be on a bigger scale than ever this year. I am to be reception committee or something; of course, I told them I was putty in their hands. Will you be my guest at the barbecue on Saturday, up at the Dam, and later let me take you to the dance? Of course, I don't mean to separate the Kirbys, perhaps I am just declaring myself in on the family party."

Nothing definite there. Yet the mere fact of his sending it, rather than saying it, when they saw each other so frequently, was somewhat suggestive of his impulse to give her an opportunity to consider his reply.

Rosalind was early at the office and alone there. She stood at the opened window, looking out upon the ordered activity of the big mill yard, and pondered.

And as she pondered a little frown came between her blue eyes, and she bit her full lower lip, and began slowly to shake her head. Cecy thought so—Mom thought so—Kate Connor thought so—Agnes Parrott, here in the office, thought so. But somehow Rosalind was unable, and perhaps also unwilling, to believe that Clyde Bainbridge was in love with her.

It was a delicious spring morning. Dew was still on the fresh thick green grass wherever there was shade, and in the meadows all about the mill larks were whirling up, mad with song. Beyond the meadows again rose the great low slopes of the hillside farms, checkered neatly with orchards and vineyards, showing drifts of gold where the buttercups were, and broken for little canyons and rich, clustering groups of trees, and beyond these again were the mighty purple flanks of the great

mountain range, shining in sunlight, and with cloud-shadows moving across their majestic heights.

Two sides of the big yard were enclosed by the wings of the mill; everything was sanitary, open, painted white, swept, shining. Men in white linen suits were loading trucks with barrels, the great warehouse doorway was open, and the white mastodons aligned outside it, motionless, awaiting their load. There was a railroad spur curving in at the open white gates and on it a string of empties marked with the names of far-away cities. Baltimore, Buffalo, St. Paul, Chicago, Chicago, Chicago.

Rosalind's thoughts went wandering over that long-obliterated prairie trail, and she sighed. She would like to go away. She would like to travel—somewhere—anywhere——

"But would I?" she thought, sensibly, glancing at the note again and crushing it in her palm as she resumed her dreamy study of the yard. Gates Mill was her world, after all; she knew and wanted no other. To be happy here, to have people love her, to belong to the Improvement Club, and to have a pretty house up in the Harrison Street neighbourhood, and some day to have a nice group of little girls and boys was her highest ambition.

Perhaps it was hardly that; she had never formulated it. During the happy months of her engagement to Jack all this had been slowly taking shape in her mind, and she had thought of it as her life, and a life only too full of satisfaction and peace and delight. Love had been the reality, and all the details hazy and sweet and unimportant.

Now that was over. That was over for ever.

Not easily had Rosalind renounced it and come to

this springtime hour of peace and quiet musing. She was an older Rosalind, a sterner, quieter woman than the girl who had been Jack Talbot's promised wife only a year ago. She had lived, as she had told her sister, because she did not die.

But something had died, something trustful, youthful, confident, and irresponsible, on the burning August day upon which Jack Talbot had awkwardly, embarrassedly managed somehow to tell her that he wanted to be rid of his bargain.

Rosalind was young, and she had presently rallied from the blow. Her radiant hair was still glorious in rippling burned-gold, her deep blue eyes were still the most beautiful in Gates Mill. Mom, and the younger children, Cecy and Ned and Audrey, and her old, weak-witted, endearing grandfather, had still had claims upon her—her time, her interest and energy, her salary. The world must be faced and life must go on, over shame and hurt and discouragement, over tears and fatigue and young despair.

Rosalind had stumbled on as best she might, fighting for courage, praying for help. When, a few weeks after old Mr. Talbot's death, had come the announcement of his son's immediate marriage to Edith Rogers, the break had come. Rosalind had quite simply fainted, a few days before the wedding, and offering no apology or explanation to the family had lain all through a silent, foggy Saturday, a long Sunday, and part of Monday, flat, silent, uncomplaining, and almost without speaking, upon her bed.

It had been warm-hearted Agnes Parrott who had telephoned to Jack's house, for Mrs. Kirby, on Sunday night, when a conference had been held outside of

Rosalind's door. But what he never would know was that he had been quite accessible at the moment; his mother might have summoned him without raising her voice instead of suavely answering Agnes that Mr. Jack was not at home just at present, was there any message?

"He's right there," Agnes had reported to Mrs. Kirby, baffled, and hanging up the telephone. "He won't come. What do you know about that? I know he's there, because Augusta Haynes answered the telephone and she said, 'Yes, he's here.'"

And the following day, running in at noon to see the silent, hollow-eyed Rosalind who was still lying apathetic and stricken in the darkened bedroom, Agnes had followed a sudden instinct to report this episode.

The effect had been all she hoped. A glint had come into Rosalind's dull eyes and she had risen up: weak, white, weary, it is true, but unmistakably nerved for the fight. She had accompanied Agnes back to the office that afternoon.

Dark hours followed, but none so hard as these had been, and slowly Rosalind's colour, her spirit and courage, had returned. With a sort of desperate resolution she had set herself to learn, to study, to improve, to make herself the sort of woman a Kirby—a Tallifer of Gates Mill—should be, and to take with her upon the upward road the straggling, irresponsible, affectionately inefficient group of the Kirbys.

No dances, no movies, no idle wandering about River Street from the soda-counters to the one-night stand at the Grand Opera House this winter. Rosalind had outgrown them all. She was a little thinner, but only more exquisitely pretty than ever as the beautiful moulding of chin and cheek bones became a trifle more

accentuated, and the deep setting of the blue eyes a little more marked.

And if there was sometimes a new sternness in her mouth, and a flash of something determined and coolly appraising in her eyes, and if sometimes the old gay outlook upon life was tinged with new bitterness and disillusionment, those who loved her said that this was natural and would pass with time, and all the outer world only knew that Jack Talbot, who had "gone" for months with the oldest Kirby girl, had suddenly turned round and married Edith Rogers, and that Rose Kirby was working over at Terry's now, and getting on awfully well, everyone said.

And before Christmas everybody was in a position to add that she could have Clyde Bainbridge, if she wanted him.

Why shouldn't she or any other girl in her senses want him? Rose mused, with his letter in her hand. He was—well, everything.

He was respected, good, intelligent, ambitious, to begin with. He had lived in Gates Mill for fourteen years, when he had come to keep his old uncle company in the house above the old quarry. Clyde's father and mother, both long dead, had lived in the town; the Bainbridge family had always been highly esteemed. When Clyde's uncle, old Robert Bainbridge, died, he had left him a small inheritance and the house, and Clyde after two years spent in pursuing a mechanical engineering course in college, had returned to Gates Mill to begin work humbly in Terry's Mills. Five years ago he had gone over to the Talbot Iron Works, at a salary flatteringly rumoured to be four thousand a

year, and now he was general manager, vice-president, and, after the immediate family of the late founder, chief stockholder in the business.

In person he was well-knit, slender, straight, and of a good height, if not tall. His complexion was olive, his eyes gray, and his hair raven black. Long ago, Rosalind had identified him as the best-dressed and best-groomed man in Gates Mill, and it was no secret that more than one woman of about his own age, which was perhaps thirty-two or three, had betrayed a willingness to become his bride. Edith Rogers's unmarried aunt, Pauline Rogers, from Mile End, had giggled and whispered and intimated all sorts of romantic secrets regarding her friendship for Clyde Bainbridge only a few years ago, and Clyde had undoubtedly visited the old Rogerses' place at Mile End, and dined at the Rogerses' twice while Aunt Pauline was there.

And the school-teacher sister of Mrs. George Terry, Lucilla Thorne, had been another warm friend of Clyde, making it an especial point to see him when she visited the family, and sending him a remembrance at Christmas, and otherwise doing all that a maiden lady might to cement their friendship. All Gates Mill knew these truths, and smiled when Mrs. Terry sent her sister and Clyde to sit at late service in the Terry pew at St. Luke's, alone, or when Mrs. Rogers augmented her sister-in-law's pleasant supper invitation to Clyde with all her heartiest and most motherly unction.

He would be a great catch in every sense for a little girl living in Old Mill Lane and working in Terry's office.

Rosalind liked him, too, although she had not yet come to feel very much at ease or quite her silly, gay self with him. Their friendship had begun over their

French books, Clyde coming, dignified and very much in earnest, to Miss Cartier for lessons. He already spoke commercial Spanish, it appeared, but he wanted to get enough French to deal with a sudden post-war demand for the "Centipedes," in France. For the fame of the little Talbot farm tractor was growing every day.

He and Rosalind talked about the town, about books, about the Terrys, and the Talbots, the personalities of their friends. Rose liked his brief dismissing of Jack with "Jack's all right, but he lets himself be run by anybody and everybody—he's always with the last speaker. I tell him so!" Clyde had finished, with his usual half-smile.

Then had come more definite signs of a ripening friendship—drives, theatres, an occasional lecture or concert. At Christmas time Clyde had sent Rosalind roses, which filled her with pleasure, and a handsome set of Conrad's books, which made her thoughtful. Through the early part of the year he had called upon her regularly.

Now April—and this invitation for Golden West Week. He was unquestionably serious, she had to admit. Did she want to step into just what she had so recently, and so bitterly, had to forego—position, comforts, dignity, the best of everything that Gates Mill could offer?

Clyde was really in no way less of a match than Jack Talbot, and in some ways he had the advantage, at least from a girl's point of view. Clyde had not a relative in the world, no father or mother-in-law to complicate matters. And what he had, in the way of prosperity and success, he had honestly earned himself.

Clyde Bainbridge, the older men of the village were wont to say prophetically, "would go a long way." He was twelve years older than Rosalind, yes, but then Jack had been seven or eight years older and it was surely splitting hairs to assume that that difference was significant of anything at all.

There would be an element of real triumph in this marriage, too, for Rosalind. Jack had affronted and slighted her, as Clyde's wife she would be back in his life again, not the less powerful, not the less esteemed, because he had chosen to fling her aside.

"Yes, but Ag, saying he's prosperous and respected, and all that, is the material side of it," Rosalind said to her confidante, soberly. "I like him—enormously. But I feel as if, where men and love-making and getting married are concerned, I've—I've broken the machinery!" she finished, with a troubled smile.

"Oh, you haven't!" Agnes assured her, confidently. Agnes's vocation was for the cloister, and all men were alike to her. "It would be a good one on Jack Talbot," added Agnes, with mild relish.

"I told him that he'd be sorry some day!" Rosalind recalled, staring into space.

"I should think that any one who married Edith Rogers would be sorry," Agnes conceded, forcefully. "She's my idea of *nothing!*"

"No, but do you think that that was wrong, Ag?"

"What was?"

"My telling him that I hoped he would live to be sorry."

"No, I don't," Agnes said, sturdily. "You wouldn't want to hurt him, or to have a child of his born blind, or anything——"

"Oh, my gracious, no!"

"Just to get even," Ag phrased it, "and have those Rogerses and Talbots, who think that the rest of us are privileged to work, and make money for them, taken down a few pegs. I'll tell the world I hope he will, too! He certainly treated you terribly, and I'd love to see you marry Mr. Bainbridge, and put it all over them—— That isn't a very Christian spirit, I guess," Agnes interrupted herself, suddenly, in compunction.

But Rosalind was not listening.

"Still, I wouldn't want to marry a man unless I really did love him!" she mused. And for her next confidante she chose her mother, as having been happily married to a man ten years older than herself.

Mrs. Kirby had been widowed for almost five years, and whatever weaknesses the late Joe Kirby had possessed had been long ago blotted from her loyal memory. She saw matrimony now as an all-protecting, all-satisfying haven to which she hoped life would carry her beloved girls. There had been many reasons why Jack Talbot's attentions to Rosalind had been deeply gratifying, but these reasons were equally good in the case of Clyde Bainbridge. Of the two, Mrs. Kirby rather fancied the older man.

For the rest, like all the world, she saw no particular cause why a girl should fancy one man more than another, visible assets being equal. Had either been intemperate, coarse, ugly, penniless, she might seriously have debated the case with Rosalind. Neither was; they were the two most interesting young men in town, and her beautiful daughter had only to choose between them. Rosalind had had Jack at her feet and had quarrelled with him, and that was all over. Now she

had the other, and if, after her undoubted distress over the broken attachment, she was going to console herself thus rapidly, her mother was deeply grateful.

"I don't believe any nice girl feels perfectly sure about marriage, Rose," she told her daughter kindly. "I'm sure I didn't—I was a perfect child, and I had been married for months before I began to appreciate how deeply I loved your father. I cried terribly, I know, for days before the ceremony, and for days after, for that matter——"

"Pop must have had a keen time!" Cecilia commented.

"Well, that's the way all girls feel," Mrs. Kirby said, seriously. "Flirting is all very well, and running around with this one and that, any girl can do that, but then there comes a time when a girl says, 'Why should I get married at all? I'm perfectly happy as I am! I don't know anything about it——'"

"That's just it!" Rosalind interrupted, painfully and eagerly interested.

"But that just shows it is time for you to think about these things, dear," her mother told her. "Why, I think it would be disgusting for a girl to consider marriage with perfect assurance—there would be something so indelicate about it. A girl *ought* to hesitate, and weigh matters, and ask herself if she is sure——"

"But I thought the *grande passion* carried you right off your feet!" Rose submitted, smiling doubtfully.

"Oh, my dear," her mother said, sighing and smiling, too, "that is utter nonsense! There is a wonderful and a beautiful love that comes with marriage——"

There was a great deal of this, all comforting to Rose. But after awhile, when Cecy had gone, she said:

"But, Mom, here's what worries me: I'm not anxious to get married, and I'm not anxious to stay single—that isn't it. And I like Clyde, of course, and so does every one else. But this is the thing. It seems to me I felt differently when—when Jack Talbot and I were—going together."

"Rosalind," her mother asked, troubled, "you don't still think about Jack?"

"Think about a man who married another girl a few weeks after he broke with me?" Rosalind asked in turn, bright hot colour in her cheeks. "No. I detest him when I think of him at all!" she said, briefly.

"To tell you the truth," said her mother, "I believe it was because neither you nor Jack was in serious earnest that you never worried about it. You may have had what you youngsters call a crush on each other, but you never got as close to being married to him as you are to Mr. Bainbridge this minute! He's a man, Clyde Bainbridge, and Jack was never anything but a helter-skelter boy!"

"That might have been it," Rosalind admitted, struck.

"More than that," Mrs. Kirby pursued, "I wouldn't be too sure of Mr. Bainbridge, Rose. It would be an odd thing if a man like that came after you when it's well known he could have almost any woman in town! A few flowers and books are all very well, and natural, too, I'm sure, since you've been studying together so much, but that isn't like a serious offer of marriage, by a good deal."

"No, of course not," Rose agreed, impressed with this view of the matter, and the more inclined to think well

of Clyde, now that there was a lessened probability of her attracting him. She showed her mother his letter about Golden West Week.

"Ah, well, you see, he simply wants to go with the family!" Mrs. Kirby said, in a relieved tone. "I don't think there's one thing in it, Rose, and I confess I'm glad!"

Rose, a little piqued, consequently ignored the note until the following evening, when she met Clyde at Miss Cartier's, and could say, pleasantly casual:

"Oh, about Golden West Week—my mother said to tell you she would be delighted to have you with us at the barbecue, and to ask you if perhaps you would have dinner with us before the dance. She and my grandfather and little sister won't go downtown that night, probably, or if they do they'll go home early. But the rest of us can go!"

Clyde, who was adjusting his glasses to bend his attention to irregular verbs, gave her a somewhat whimsical smile.

"Why, but there's a public banquet, you know, at the Grand Opera House. Speeches and music and singing and all sorts of excitement!"

"Oh," Rose apologized, "and must you go?"

"Well——" he hesitated. "I hoped you would," he said, flushing a little.

Rose flushed brightly in her turn. This was unequivocal, this was not to be misconstrued. If Clyde Bainbridge took her to the Chamber of Commerce dinner, where all the Rogerses and Terrys and Talbots would be gathered in full glory, her engagement to him would be tacitly admitted. She had a sudden vision of herself there—Kate Connor, dressmaker, who

boarded with the Kirbys, would make over her rose-coloured dress——

"Clyde," she said to him on the following Sunday, when they were driving up through the orchards and scattered oaks that rose to Summit Rock, "there's something I have to say to you, and I'm going to risk your not misunderstanding my saying it now. I was engaged to Jack Talbot a year ago, you know——"

He gave her an oblique glance.

"Yes, I knew that, of course."

"He was the first—boy—I ever liked," Rosalind said, slowly. "He met Edith Rogers; they hadn't seen each other for years. Both their mothers were mad to have them like each other——"

"Yes, I knew that," Clyde assured her again, as she paused. "The old man used to talk to me about it."

"And what did he say about me?"

"Well, he was extremely anxious not to have Jack marry——" Clyde hesitated. "You knew that?" he asked.

She had known it, of course. But she flushed crimson.

"They are all snobs," Clyde said, after a silence. "They have accepted me now—money talks, I suppose. But I remember the time when I went to Mrs. Talbot—she had known my mother, and asked her to use her influence with old Talbot in getting me my first job. She talked to me for an hour about the distinction of the family, and then said that she never interfered in business affairs. And a week later she was in Crosset's with Jack when I waited on them—that was my first job, salesman in a candy store, and she pretended not to know me."

"Typical!" Rosalind said, briefly. "I wanted you to know," she persisted, after a moment, "that I—had cared—for Jack, and that our understanding—or engagement—or whatever it was—was broken by him. I don't—I don't imagine—that I will ever care that way for any one again!"

"Thank you," Clyde said, quietly. "It's all crooked and twisted, isn't it?" he smiled presently. "I'm sorry, Rose. Sorry for you, and sorrier—for me. But—wonderful as first love is—it isn't the whole story, you know."

They had reached the hill-top, and now he stopped the car so that they might look down across the great stretch of the wonderful valley, with the river winding through it, and here and there the grouped roofs of towns. The roads struck at white angles, in every direction, and here and there a windbreak of eucalyptus intersected the smiling, prosperous country with a long band of deep green.

"There, that's the cemetery, Clyde, and the cypresses. And far up there is Sparrows, beyond the Poorhouse; and that's Allens' where that terrible double murder was, when I was just a little girl!"

"Cheerful," he said, in his somewhat restrained, humorous manner. "The cemetery and the Poorhouse, and Sparrows, where the insane asylum is."

"Grandpa was at Sparrows for a while, you know," Rosalind confided suddenly. "Old Wittinger Talbot was driving the horse that ran away the day he had his accident. And Talbot was one of the Board of Sparrows. They were terribly kind to Grandpa, and afterward he was sent to Napa, and to Agnews—they hoped there might be something done for him. No use!

He came home again after four or five years of it, and to this day he has times of being perfectly terrified for fear they'll shut him up somewhere again. Did you know that he almost always sleeps out-of-doors on the side porch, or in the stable, or even right on the lawn, behind the laurels, where nobody can see him, rather than risk walls and locks again?"

"And has he always been like this, Rose?"

"Always exactly the same. Except that sometimes he gets excited, of course, and he'll think Ned is a stranger come in to spy on him, and all that. And once he threw a butcher off the porch—the man was teasing Audrey's kitten, and Audrey was crying—Grandpa can't stand seeing any of us unhappy, that's the only time he really acts—queer. But I don't know that he's so badly off, Clyde," Rosalind finished, thoughtfully; "he is very happy, puttering about with Audrey and remembering the old days when he used to be rich and important. He used to go see old Mr. Talbot now and then, and he would talk of old times just as rationally as you could!"

"Probably more rationally," Clyde, watching her interestedly, conceded, smiling. "Does he keep old papers—documents—anything like that?" he asked.

"Oh, you know that old rubbish in his tin box! We've been over it a thousand times, every little while somebody asks us if we can help clear a title—that sort of thing. But all Grandpa's things were burned when his River Street office burned, a few months after the accident. He still bemoans," Rose finished, laughing, "the volume of the Encyclopædia! And there was a duplicate of the old Towner nugget that Mr. Towner had made for some banquet, and lots of little things

that Grandpa still regrets. You can get him talking about them, any time!"

"Do you know he is still a most interesting old fellow to talk to?" Clyde said.

Rose shot him a friendly glance; a sudden, new feeling of compunction and doubt went through her. What satisfaction she could afford Mom and Cecy, and all of them at home, and what happiness she could give this kindly, intelligent, admirable man, by just softening a little, by being a trifle more encouraging, a trifle less frozen and self-centred! If one man had proved irresponsible and cruel, why not learn from that bitter experience that the essential—the permanent relationship between two persons might be based upon something better than excitement and dreams?

Driving home in the lingering green sweetness of the spring afternoon, Rosalind thought of all the women who had allowed one feverish youthful affair to blight all their lives, who lived unmarried, childless, purposeless, through the rest of their days, idealizing what was only ordinary clay, and adding to a man's unimportant injustice a supreme and lifelong injustice of their own.

The happiest marriages were based upon liking, respect, community of interests, mutual friends. Why should Rosalind permit Jack Talbot to rob her of all the sweetest things of life? Wasn't that the history of all old maids? So sure, when the first failed them, and the second seemed something short of perfection, that there would of course be a third?

"Good-night, Clyde, and thanks for the lovely drive," she said, with a significant little air of friendliness he had never seen in her before, when they reached her door. "And—about what you said on the mountain.

about first love not being the whole story. I know it isn't. I feel it more and more. And I'm not sure but what respect—and companionship—and liking, might easily come to be the better thing!"

She had given him her hand, and he still sat at the wheel, looking down at its brownness and smoothness and slimness with an odd smile in his eyes.

"You make me very happy, Rose," he said.

CHAPTER XIV

GOLDEN WEST WEEK, with special shows at the movie houses, and entertainments by the Y. M. C. A., and the Boy Scouts, and the High-School students, with picnics of the various Sunday Schools, and entertainments by the Elks and the Lions Club and the Knights, passed in a blaze of glory. The weather was very warm, bright, clear, shining; the whole town was perfumed by the gardens of roses and sweet peas, syringa and bridal wreath and lilac, yellow broom and tasselled acacia, which were watered in the warm, soft, tree-shaded hours before breakfast by women in casual bungalow aprons, with their hair bundled into curls and waves for the festive day.

All Gates Mill rejoiced and was glad. The laughter, the meetings, the joyous streaming of flags, the splendid strains of brass upon the idle zephyrs made the six days memorable to everyone and Paradise for the few. To girls in limp pink organdies, with roses from Bond's Bargain Basement upon their chip hats, to the boys who walked at their sides, to the swarming children, homely little girls conscious of curls and white stockings, pretty little girls conscious of the new cheap gingham with the chambray cuffs, life sang and shone in these halcyon hours.

There were fireworks in the park on Monday night, and the "United Churches Community Supper" on Tuesday, and the Minstrel Show on Wednesday, and

Thursday was "Bigger and Better Gates Mill Day," with pencil-selling for the District Nurse Fund, and tagging for the Orphanage, and with Bond's giving a souvenir with every dollar purchase, and Hellman making every hundredth sale free, large or small, with The Emporium handing out balloons to every child, "when accompanied," and the Palais Royal pinning an artificial rose, japonica, or golden poppy upon the breast of every visitor. And on Friday came the Governor, and there were speeches, and a parade, with the mahogany-coloured, collapsed, lace-shrouded old Señora Oldracena muttering under her *rebosa* and cheered as she was driven slowly up and down River Street, and forty-seven decorated cars and floats, two bands, the Scouts and Campfire Girls, the Lions Club, the W. C. T. U. with their white banner, and a score of lesser organizations trailing after.

Old Nat Tallifer, with two other veteran pioneers, was also driven slowly back and forth in an open car draped with splendid flags; Rose's grandfather always took this sort of honour with great dignity, and graciously acknowledged the shouts and cheers from the watching throngs. Cecy was strikingly pretty as an Indian Maid, in the "Days of Yore" float; Audrey ecstatic as a pink-legged angel, hovering over the "Birth of Gold." Ned found a deep, a wordless joy in being impressed into service to run a taxi for the Eagle Garage, and Mrs. Kirby revived a draggled foulard, had the jointed handle of her old lace parasol mended, and fared forth with Kate Connor, to see and be seen, and modestly to claim her father and her daughters, in turn, as the pageant slowly moved by.

Rose, of course, was Columbia; Rose was always

Liberty or Columbia. She had no reason, no defensible reason, for evading the responsibility this year.

And Rose was young, after all, loving excitement, thrilled by youth, pride, patriotism, in all the stir of this gala week. She planned Audrey's costume, Cecy's costume; she got out the gold paper crown and the cheesecloth of her own robes. And buying pink stockings and rouge and gold paper at Bond's, she met all the world laughing and excited over similar purchases, and felt the happy contagion of the whole town's exultation.

The sun shone, and the great trees softly moved their heavy canopies of green; girls gathered whispering and giggling in the deserted rooms of the Grammar School and dressed and laughed and streamed forth to form ranks; music blew about street corners; boys shrilled on horns, and every train and trolley was packed with perspiring family groups, which descended, shook themselves apart, divided baskets, babies, and the quivering hands of the smaller children, and plunged into the river that was moving to and fro upon the sidewalks of what was known as the "Line of March."

The county roads were black with cars; the Woman's Club and the Reception Committee were responsible for bunting-fenced "Comfort Stations," with "Park Here. Eat Your Lunch Here," hospitably painted upon boxed cloth signs. Coffee and "hot dog" stands, popcorn wagons, peanut and candy stalls, the usual Oriental fortune teller, the usual deafening carrousels sprang up in the side streets.

The parade was to start at half-past ten, but everybody in the Kirby house was astir at six, irons were heating for last-minute pressing, food was cooking for

the picnic next day, half-dressed girls ran in and out of the open doors with flags and bunting and coloured ribbons. Cecy rushed to River Street, rushed back with a parcel, Mrs. Kirby, with characteristic slackness had neglected to secure a seat on the line of march, she and Kate Connor would "manage nicely," she said. By nine o'clock the kitchen and passage were full of the girls' friends, who had come in to share the excitement and accompany them to the scene of the parade's start.

It was burning hot. River Street wore a holiday aspect, draped with flags and strung with paper lanterns; motor cars flashed importantly to and fro. The Kirby group was given a lift, eleven hilarious young persons, variously burdened, clinging gaily to an open car.

"Look at Jack Talbot as 'Labour!'" said Agnes Parrott, who, homely, raw-boned, efficient, had taken it upon herself to see that all the properties of the "Liberty Float" were assembled. "I call that pretty good!" added Agnes, indulgently scornful.

Rosalind's heart stood still. She had seen him occasionally, of course, in the last few months, but only as she had seen him in the office of the flour mill, when there were others about, and they had no opportunity to speak to each other. The Talbot family was in mourning; Jack and his young wife had taken almost no part in last winter's social life, even if Rosalind's circle had been the one in which they moved. And she no longer worked in the offices of the Iron Works, so that the old daily habit of catching a glimpse of him at least, perhaps having a few words with him, of having him take her home in his car, had long ago joined the com-

pany of all the other things that made last year seem so unreal when she remembered it.

"Hello," said Jack, coming up. "My Lord, isn't it hot?"

They were all under the big locust trees in the side yard of the Grammar School, waiting for the signal to start. Motor cars smothered in flags and bunting and flowers were coming and going; the spangled, socked, fluffy-headed children of the Better Babies Float were threading a mass of anxious, hard-working women, whose mouths were full of pins and tacks and dangling string, and of oily, perspiring, dirty men, who tinkered with engines, crawled under cars, experimented with roaring engines, and wiped everything within reach with bunched handfuls of dirty waste.

"My gooniz, we ought to get started!" said a baby's mother, to any one who would listen. "It's something terrible, keeping chirren out in the heat, this way!"

Not far away the band could be heard, practising softly. The trolley's bells jangled unceasingly, above shouts, shrieks, motor horns, cowbells.

"Look, Rose, the sheep acrost in Miller's field are eatin' just like it was evvy day!" said little Audrey Kirby to her sister wonderingly. Rose, who had made a seventh descent from the float, bent her exquisite flushed face, to lay it against the lean little freckled one, and laughed.

"Do you hear her?" Rose said, raising eyes brimming with love and mirth. "She says that Miller's sheep are eating just as usual!"

It was to Jack Talbot that she spoke; they were face to face, and addressing each other for the first time since that August day when he had come to find her in Old

Mill Lane, and had left her a crushed and broken and silent creature, staring with lack-lustre eyes, into a future that seemed unbearable. Rosalind had often wondered how it would be when they met again.

Jack wore a red shirt, loose corduroy breeches, a broad hat, and carried a pick. His companions were all more picturesque: a cowboy, a miner, a Spanish padre, a rancher in nail-studded leather and belled hat. But he was splendid, nevertheless: lean, young, tall, with a burned brown throat, and muscular brown arms bared.

"What did she say?" he asked, of Audrey.

"She was surprised to see Miller's sheep calmly eating grass on parade day!" Rose answered, easily.

Jack burst into the laugh she remembered so well.

"I love it!" he said. He wiped his wet forehead with a red handkerchief. "Say, isn't this broiling?" he demanded.

"Ah, but it's a wonderful day!" Rose said, looking up at the moving layers of green above them, and into the enamelled blue of the sky where a tiny whisk of "horses' tails" was all that remained of the early morning fog. "I love it—celebrating!" she said, giving him a full, serious look from the eyes that were so exquisitely blue under their dark lashes that Jack found himself thinking of Rose Kirby's eyes again. "I love —Gates Mill," Rose finished, half to herself.

"This jay place, with nothing but webfoots in it, where your father and mine, for no *earthly* reason, decided to settle, instead of a decent town like San Francisco or Los Angeles," was the way Edith, his wife, usually put it. Edith was not in the parade to-day; she said that she and his mother might go down to

the Bank windows and watch it, if it wasn't too awfully hot, and that ghastly crowd on River Street didn't make it impossible to get anywhere. She supposed he would have to go to the barbecue to-morrow, and they both would have to be at the banquet, but thank goodness they could get out of the dance, and then the whole horrible week, that brought a lot of horrible streaming people to Gates Mill, would be over for another year!

But Jack had a man's affection for the little town that had been his home, and his father's before him, and it seemed sweet to him to-day to have Rose Kirby, glorious as Columbia, stoop to kiss her silly little sister, raise those wonderful eyes of hers so contentedly to the sky, and say so pleasantly: "I love Gates Mill."

"You seem—just a part of it, yourself!" he said, not knowing quite what he was trying to express, and making a gesture that included the encircling slopes of the foothills, checkered with orchards and vineyards, and the scented, dreaming fields dotted with spreading oaks, and the far mountains, which seemed made to-day of clear violet gauze.

"Rose," said Clyde Bainbridge, coming up to her. "Good morning, Jack, pretty warm clothing for this weather," he added, with a nod. "Rose," he resumed, "your mother said to tell you that Mr. Bond had offered her and Mrs. Connor seats right in front of the Town Hall, and she'll wave to you from there. And Ned's driving the Chinese float—tickled to death, he wanted you to know! And the arrangement is—I've got to be in the office this afternoon, and may not get round to the picture to-night——"

She had turned that concentrated, sweet look upon

Clyde, Jack saw. He lingered in her neighbourhood, tightening the nails that held the red, white, and blue bunting in place. Now he heard Rose interrupt.

"Oh, Clyde, you must! They're going to run two reels of River Street, you know, with everybody in it! We had it taken Monday, Mayor Rudolph giving Señora Oldracena the keys of the city, you know, and our float, and everything. Oh, and I'm so delighted about Mom and Ned!"

"I will if I can. But in any case, the arrangement is that I come for you all to-morrow at half-past ten——"

"Which does *not* mean ten-thirty-one!" Rose interpolated, seriously.

"Now look here—you have an idea that I was mad about your sister being late that night——" Jack heard Clyde begin explainingly as he and Rose moved a few feet away and continued their conversation in lower tones, while Rose straightened the beads and fringes of the moccasined Cecy, who had crossed the jumbled school yard with the conscious, mincing gait only assumed by young girls on such occasions. Cecy was rouged, costumed, her dark hair streamed free under a feathered band; she may not have been the most beautiful of created beings or the centre of attraction, but, with all the other High-School girls, she felt herself so and was utterly excited and happy.

And then the National Guard was in line, and after some thrilling throbbing of drums the music struck up and the big motors rumbled into their places.

Rosalind's chariot when she climbed into it was, as usual, somewhat shaky. She and her accompanying graces, "Peace," "Industry," "Prosperity," "Liberty," got into gales of laughter as they disposed their draper-

ies, and assumed the correct attitudes. Columbia was standing, the others grouped at her feet. A mane of burned-gold hair fell over her shoulders; her youthful body was womanly beauty incarnate under the simple robe, the young firm breasts lifting the thin white folds, one knee raised, with the bare white ankle and the sandalled foot exposed, and one arm flung high behind her head to catch the coarse, heavy folds of the glorious flag that made a background for the exquisite glow and colour of America's girlhood. Rose's other hand was spread across the bound ribbons on her breast, her eyes were serious, uplifted, her mouth half-smiling.

"It isn't bunk!" she said to Idaline Snyder, whose coppery locks shone beside the great shield she steadied with a full white arm. "I do—I like this sort of thing. I—I like to be an American!"

"I never thought of being anything else," "Prosperity," in the person of little Dora Ribaud, said wide-eyed. Dora would presently wipe her eyes when the Better Babies Float passed them on its way into line, and when the band played "Maryland."

All along River Street drooping onlookers brightened and braced. Far away still, just a faint piping and stir blocks distant under the big trees and under the bunting and flags that hung so still in the hot morning air, yet they were really coming at last!

"They said ten-thirty, and it's only twenty minutes to twelve," said voices. "Pretty good!"

"Oh, lookety—lookety—look! With the bang, bang, bang for the baby!" said the wearied little mother of four, in a parked car, as she danced a sodden lump of eleven-months-old humanity.

"We're going to miss it, anyway; let's go back!" said

Edith Talbot, disgustedly, at the edge of the crowd, despairing of pushing her way through to the comfortable shaded space that awaited her in the Bank's big window. "Don't Rose Kirby make the grandest Columbia!" said a hundred affectionate voices. "That's her grandfather—he's a little cracked—the big one with the white beard."

The slow motion of her chariot stirred just enough of a breeze to lift the soft tendrils of hair about Rose's damp forehead; she was smiling a little but entirely in her part. She stood to-day for a personality all goodness, all bigness, all hospitality to a despondent world; she opened her arms to-day to the crushed and hungry and long-abused nations of Europe; she said, "Here is gold, work, friendship; here is liberty and justice for you! Your own countries make you slaves! Come and be men in mine!"

"*Oh, thus be it ever, when freemen shall stand——*" blared the band, and Rose felt the tears pricking behind her solemnly uplifted eyes. And in her heart an odd little tingling ache, familiar for many months, was stilled and satisfied. She had met Jack Talbot, met him casually and easily—if there had been honours, in this first encounter, they were hers.

But Jack, shirted, bare-throated, holding his pick, had not so happily escaped from the meeting. He stood perfectly still, staring after her when she moved away: and even after the beginning of the parade was actually in motion, he still stood, in the heat and stir and noise, staring absently after her.

"Jack, for the Lord's sake, what's the big idea?" said Fred Rogers, sweating in the blazing flannel shirt that commemorated the old hook-and-ladder company of

pioneer times. "They're waiting for you! Get a move on!"

Almost dazedly, Jack roused, nodded, and moved toward his place. Rose, kissing little Audrey, looking skyward, happy that Ned and Mom were happy—Rose, so easy, so friendly with her "Clyde," and her plans for to-morrow——

"I hope he's in love with her and they get married," Jack tried to think, settling himself against a boulder made of fruit boxes covered with iron-gray silesia. But the idea was painful; he wanted Rose to marry happily, of course, but not yet. Not to Clyde Bainbridge, anyway.

CHAPTER XV

But it was only the next day, at the barbecue, that Jack heard of their engagement. He stood stricken when he heard it, his eyes dazed for a minute, and his mouth dry, and the palms of his big hands wet. Then he went on automatically handling the great chunks of half-raw and half-singed meat that formed the chief of the midday meal. Rose Kirby and Bainbridge——! The sunlight seemed to have an odd brassy quality to Jack, and nothing for the rest of the day seemed normal.

It was another burning day. The sun beat down steadily upon the clustered oaks and madrone trees, under whose shade the picnic tables were set. The ground here was trampled clean and bare, and strewn with picnic baskets buried in coats, and grouped neatly with thermos bottles, cameras, and the handbags containing the necessities of small children. Three hundred dusty, spotted little cars were parked in long rows in the shiny, burned, light-brown grass outside the grove; women in dresses beginning to wilt were coming and going busily; fathers of families, working their way into the churning crowd about the spits, forked off large smoking pieces of the roasting sides of beef and ran shouting toward their waiting clans.

The air was stained with smoke and dust and quivering with oily heat waves; it was scented with the roasting meat and hot metal and burned rubber brakes and a hundred odours of food, the appetizing smell of coffee

predominating. Everybody shared a panic impulse to seize food at once, before it was all gone, and everybody knew that there was twice too much of everything. Here and there a conscientious little couple started a small twig fire to heat a bottle, or a young woman, with a watching friend on the alert for male intruders, nursed her baby peacefully, her back against a tree bole. Elderly women, oily-skinned in the heat, wearing gray or chocolate percales made and laundered by their own hands, and black straw hats adorned with flowers from the "Five and Ten," opened cardboard boxes, wiped fruit, and cut sticky layer cakes, looking about for recipients, licking their fingers appreciatively, maternal to all boys. "Here, take it then, you yowling Injuns, and kill yourselves! Travel now, Tom Willis, you've had two pieces. Mis' Burns didn't make this cake for you boys to stuff!"

"Thought 'twasn't going to get made at all, the way that oil stove of mine cut up," Mrs. Burns would perhaps confess, laying sliced ham rapidly upon paper plates. "Ade's havin' the kitchen done and I says to Chess I cooked as much soot as eggs this morning!"

"Notice Clyde Bainbridge with the Kirbys all day?" the other woman might ask.

"Say, ain't that funny? Lizzie spoke to me about it. You don't suppose——?"

"Well, I just do. I think somebody isn't going to spend her life crying her eyes out for spilt milk.—Say, just take that little piece off my finger, dear—taste that. Ain't that delicious? That's Grandma Porter's ham, cooked in buttermilk."

"My mouth's all cocoanut, but it don't matter. Say, that is *good.*—But I hope Rose Kirby gets him—

I really do. There isn't a sweeter and prettier girl in town, if he is one of the big bugs!"

It was just some such gossip as this that Jack Talbot heard, confirmed a few minutes later by a second, and then by a third scrap. And more than all confirmed by the sight he had only to turn and glance up toward the woods to see, the sight of all the Kirbys picnicking, idling, talking in the shade of a group of maverick pines, and Clyde Bainbridge with them.

They were staying rather by themselves, the plump, pleasant-mannered, rather pathetically pretentious mother; the frankly sleepy, frankly greedy young son who lay with his head in her lap; the magnificent old grandfather, with his flowing beard of milky white; monkeyish little Audrey biting hard olives; Cecy a saucy gipsy in a red hat and a skimpy little white dress with a red midshipman's tie, Dory Barker in attendance, and lastly Clyde and Rosalind—Rosalind, as lovely as the English heroine whose namesake she was, had ever been under other great trees in another land. She was unpacking a basket, she was pouring coffee, she was looking over at her mother, up into Clyde's face, she had given her old grandfather a kiss with the sandwich she handed him, she had halted Audrey to tie the draggled string of the child's scuffed little oxford.

There was a shadowy, lacy black hat upon her shining hair and her dress was black and lacy, too; Jack knew the dress. She had often spoken of it to him as "my old lace." Old indeed it must be, but it looked cool and thin and charming to-day, in the quivering heat.

He never thought of himself as loving her, or having loved her, or as regretting that she was lost to him. It seemed to him that what had happened between them

had happened to other persons, actuated by motives he could not even remember, and long, long ago. His whole world had changed; his father was dead and Bainbridge was managing the Iron Works, and he was married to Edith Rogers.

Just why life should seem so totally different a thing to-day from what it had been a year ago, he tried to puzzle out to his own satisfaction, as he moved about playing the part of a public-spirited citizen and helping to make the barbecue a success. In the first place, he reminded himself for the thousandth time, he must be happy because he had everything in the world to make him so.

He had Edith, his wife, to begin with. And as Jack came to her name he was conscious of experiencing something like a spiritual full stop. She was an ideal wife, everyone told him.

Well, then, the fault must be his. Jack had long before this come humbly and philosophically to the conclusion that whether it was or not, what readjusting and what adapting must be done to make their marriage a success would be done by him. Edith quietly, positively, finally, refused to acknowledge deficiencies even of the most trivial type on her part, and at the slightest criticism or opposition would create with premeditated passion a scene that disrupted their relationship for days.

"When you will make a full and complete apology," she would stipulate smoothly, as a prelude to peace overtures. Jack came to loathe the phrase. There was no arguing with her; she knew neither heart nor reason, and hence she had the advantage of a man who was not only instinctively just but who genuinely longed for affection and peace.

He had naturally made her happiness his first consideration during the early days and weeks of their marriage; he found now, with concern, that nothing would dislodge her from the centre of his universe. What Edith wanted, whether Edith would be cross or not, how Edith would take this piece of news or that, and what her attitude to him and the rest of the world was at any given moment, came to occupy with a painful and constant agitation his entire heart and mind.

Jack tried to imagine, sometimes, what unmarried men worried about. What had he worried about a year ago? His mother had seen to his laundry and tailor, his father had honoured his checks, he had gone out if he felt like going out, or remained at home to read, doze, play with the bulldog, start the victrola, or do any other thing that seemed good to him.

Edith Rogers had just been a name then—a girl at an Eastern school who had rather amused him at Christmas by sending him a saucy card. She didn't forget him, then? She was a "darned cute kid" had been his summary of Edith Rogers.

Now, irrevocably, horrifyingly, alarmingly, she was not only in his life, but in his room, a small, slim, cool-eyed creature who had the right to demand full explanations from him regarding his habits, his extravagances, his actions, his very thoughts.

She sometimes angered him, she often amazed and shocked him, but more often and more sinister than all, she almost always wearied and bored him. Sometimes he thought he would die of sheer boredom as her voice went on and on, following him about the house, questioning, interrupting, harassing.

She was jealous, exacting, curious, she was something of an egotist, a good deal of a snob, ignorant and complacent, she was restless and dissatisfied, she was erratically and alternately loving and cold, playing upon these moods as readily as a painter plays with colours. All this—and still, to the world, she was the "ideal" wife, charming little Edith Rogers, rich, of good position, only nineteen, whose "friends and code and social circle and ideals and traditions are all yours, Jackie," his mother had reiterated over and over again. She would have "something" some day, she was extraordinarily clever about tennis and golf and bridge and the piano and a thousand things, and the "families had been friends for generations!"

All true. But, Jack mused, heartsick, what of it? All these things were words—words, words, words. They represented, at best, assets on Edith's side of the ledger. If she had made a good marriage at eighteen, all the better—one more feather in the little cap she wore so arrogantly.

But where did he come in? Was he to have forty years, fifty years of playing audience to this undeveloped child, who used him in her scheme exactly as she used the riding horse to whom she loved—booted, habited, hatted severely—to feed sugar from her bare palm, holding crop and gauntlets in the other hand meanwhile as she looked about for an audience.

He could not reach her, he could not touch her, she evaded him everywhere with a pat little phrase, or tears, or fury.

She liked to go to dinner parties and exhibit her handsome young husband. She loved her new name, her

new estate. She told his mother and hers whatever seemed to her picturesque and pretty about Jack, entirely regardless of its truth or untruth.

"Jack flew into one of his rages," she would say pleasantly at her father's dinner table, "and just tore about the room. But when I explained to him that it was *little* Dicky Terry I kissed, and not big Dicky, he did look so deliciously foolish!"

"Jack talks very little about his father," Jack overheard her telling Sally Pottle, "but it was the one deep love of his life. 'My father was my pal, Edith,' he said to me. And did you know, Sally, that he went out and lay on his father's grave for *nights* after Mr. Talbot died?"

"Oh, for gracious sakes!" said Sally, thrilled. Jack, stewing inside at the hall telephone and not knowing exactly what attitude best became the eavesdropper, missed the next question. But he heard Edith say, with a long sigh:

"*Terribly*. He's jealous even of Mamma, imagine. He hates me to kiss Tootsy——"

Upon this occasion Jack had decided to reproach his wife when they were next alone.

"What'd you fill Sally Pottle up with that junk for?" he had asked, with a good-humoured air. Edith's eyes had flashed dangerously.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, about Dad—and me—and my being jealous of the pup——"

She had actually paled. Then she had tossed back the sleek, straight hair that was drying on her shoulders, given him a dagger look, and said in a breathless anger:

"You listened—to my conversation—with Sally?"

"Had to, I was right there at the telephone and I had been talking."

"Never mind where you were! You deliberately listened to my talk with Sally Pottle?"

"I had called Sacramento——"

"Jack, please don't try to digress. This—this may be much more important than you think. Our—our happiness may depend on what you say," Edith, pale, resolute, menacing, had pursued.

"Oh, for heavens' sake!" he had ejaculated, scornful yet half-indulgent, too. And inwardly he had said, as he was so often to say, to himself: "O Lord, why did I start this?"

"Jack, I *will* have an answer!" Edith had exclaimed, panting. "You—you must tell me. You didn't—you *couldn't* have listened there to what I was saying to my most intimate friend——"

"Oh, shucks!" Jack had exclaimed at this point, opening his book. Sweeping across the room, Edith had snatched it from him, a dramatic little fury in her cotton kimono, with her dangling, still-wet strands of hair.

"Answer me, Jack. Just yes or no. Did you listen or didn't you?"

He had reached for a magazine, shrugged, smiled, opened it, and regarded it blindly.

"So——" Edith had said, slowly, looking at him in a long silence, and enjoying herself, as he well knew, immensely. "So—*that's* the sort of man I've married? An eavesdropper! A man who has not the slightest rudiments of good breeding." And she had begun to walk up and down the room, her arms folded, her mane jerking with the quick jerking of her head. "Oh, I

know—I grant you," he had heard her say, "we Rogerses are a hot-tempered lot, we fight like cats and dogs, we're gypsies—but we do play the game. We keep to our code, and we don't lie, and we don't *cheat!* We play the game——"

This for some time. Then Edith had dressed her hair carefully, humming lightly as she sat at her dresser.

"Ede," Jack had finally said, with a great air of casual good-nature and something like a yawn, "aren't the Raymonds calling for us at one? It's twenty minutes of——"

There was a superb silence at the dresser, except that she went on humming. She had pressed one of the smooth folds of her mouse-coloured, fine hair close to her temple, leaned forward to get the effect, and faintly shrugged.

"Do you realize what time it is, dear?"

"Perfectly. But you see I'm not going!"

"My heaven, Ede, you've got to go! It's an old engagement."

"I haven't *got* to do anything, as you'll very soon find out, Jack Talbot. Kindly don't address me again unless you are ready to make a full and complete apology——"

She was perfectly capable of refusing to appear when the Raymonds arrived, he knew; she was probably calmly preparing for a scene, tears, sobbing. He was faced either with that, and with giving talkative and suspicious Mrs. Raymond an opportunity to say that the young Talbots fought terribly already—or he could apologize. It was much the easiest way. He wasn't going to keep this sort of thing up for ever, but until there was an open split, it was much better not to get people talking.

"Now, listen dear, if I hurt your feelings, I'm sorry. I really am——"

"You are not in the least sorry," the cool, inflexible little voice had said, as it said invariably at this point.

"Yes, I am, Edie, truly."

"All right," she had conceded, lifelessly. It was only in the very early days of their marriage that this reconciliation had brought her into his arms. She was not affectionate; she was already weary of embraces. "*Please* ——" she would say patiently, under his kisses. "I hate this *mushiness*——"

Jack told himself that he had expected occasional storms, with calm to follow. But there were already whole days—whole weeks—when just to keep her pacified, to listen, agree, feign interest, accept her reservations and indifferences, constituted the gist of his marriage with his wife.

Ten minutes later, on this particular day, she had been coquettish and prettily proprietary with him, for the benefit of the pleased and indulgent Raymonds. No, she wanted to sit next to her own husband—because he was all the husband she had——

"You two are certainly a wonderful pair of lovers!" Judge Raymond had said, in middle-aged approval; "I declare you make us old folks envy you!"

"Yes, but now I'm just going to give Jackie *one* kiss and then act just exactly as if we'd been married twenty years!" Edith had said, suiting the action daintily to the word, and slipping her firm, hard, boyish little hand into Jack's as she placed herself next to him in the motor car.

"I just think it's wonderful," his mother said some-

times, "after all our planning, that they should be so exactly suited to each other!"

"Edith went all the way to San Francisco with Amy and Fred to get just the right rug for Jack's birthday present," Edith's soft, fat, good-natured mother told her friends, with sentimentally filling eyes. "You've got a mighty sweet little girl there, my boy," her father sometimes reminded him.

The farce of it! The utter, empty absurdity of it! Jack would reflect, almost dazed by the difference between the appearance and the truth. How could he possibly follow her rapid changes from fierce criticism, from petty selfishness and childishness, to archness and affection again? There was no moment when he could be simple, honest, happy in her company.

"Edith is such a sporting loser," Juliet Barker said to him admiringly, when Juliet and Jack chanced to win a handsome prize at an Easter card party. Sporting! Jack had had to nod and smile, remembering that Edith had refused to speak to him for forty-eight hours after this event: "Not because you and Juliet won, although I think she cheats! But because you had such a *nasty*, disagreeable smile on your face when you came up and *pretended* to be sorry that you had beaten me! You can be *nastier*——" Edith had said, with a sort of passionate coldness.

"Do you love me, Ede?" he might ask her when his mother had considerately left them on the big davenport before the fire on a rainy evening.

"Please, Jack—you've caught my hair on your cuff-button——"

"Sorry. But isn't this kind of fun, Pussy, you and me here before the fire?"

"I suppose I'd feel it more if it was *my* house. But I never do feel that, Jack, and of course I never will! It's your mother's house. Amy thinks I'm awfully silly not to take a stand about it, but I say that the first move ought to come from your mother. She says I'm too generous about it, and I say I *want* to be. But it is hard, Jack, just being a bride, and wanting my own little ways, and my own friends. Now, I can have any one I want in here, of course, the girls for lunch, and all that! But it isn't the same. You see that, don't you? Please pay attention, Jack—I hate that silly kind of kissing——"

"But you do love me, Pussy?"

"I don't know whether it matters if I do or not, when you treat everything I say with such utter indifference! You mortified me to death to-day, when Bozzy was taking my picture, acting the way you did!"

"Well, it seemed to me so silly, being taken stepping into that aëroplane, with all that rig on, when in the first place you won't fly, and in the second place I wouldn't want you to!"

"Because I wanted to send it to Billy Davenport for a joke!"

"Well, with everyone looking on, and you and Bozzy making so much noise and attracting so much notice, it seemed to me silly!"

This was what Jack might want to say. But long before they had passed six months as man and wife, he knew better than to say it. He had felt himself developing, changing, accepting this bitter hour of discipline and that moment of forced and almost unbearable silence. The Jack who had raced about in the gray car, who had loitered at the Kirbys' gate in Old Mill Lane,

who had been accustomed to ask serious, luminous-eyed Rosalind: "Do you have to get bread to-night?" when he drove her home from the Iron Works, was dead.

But to be close to Rosalind again, the Rosalind who was also Columbia, exalted, rapt, and yet so humanly amused at her own emotions, this Columbia who could descend from her heights to be glad that her mother had good seats for the parade, and that her small brother was happy as a driver, stirred Jack oddly. He watched her all day throughout the barbecue, lovely, busy, friendly, ready to laugh with any uninteresting old woman or pick up any squalling, damp, bewilderedly stumbling baby. And toward the end of the hot afternoon, when the Kirby party bundled itself neatly into Clyde Bainbridge's car and drove away without even a farewell glance for him, he felt suddenly blank almost to sickness.

CHAPTER XVI

Edith was lying down when he got home at five o'clock.

"Gracious, Jack, how hot and dirty you look, you poor boy! Do get a bath before dinner!"

He was hot and dirty, and the words irritated him. What else could he conceivably do but take a bath? But he showed nothing.

"Been asleep?"

"I was until you banged the door. "I wish——" she paused.

"Wish what?"

"Never mind, it'll only make you mad."

"I didn't bang the door, if that's what you mean. It's standing wide open."

"The screen door wakened me, if you insist upon my saying it!"

"I don't insist upon your saying it, or anything!"

But this last was not one of the things he said. He removed his shoes, and flung himself down upon his own bed without speaking.

"Jack, please don't rumple that cover. Please take it off. If you knew the *trouble* I take to keep the place looking decent. You go to these ridiculous things," pursued Edith, in her smooth, cool young voice, "and get yourself simply exhausted, and then come home and expect me to sympathize with you! I don't see why you go. You don't have to!"

"I do have to. I'm on the Entertainment Committee!"

"Well, you don't have to be on the Entertainment Committee," Edith said, buffing her nails.

"No," said Jack, goaded out of silence at last, "and I don't have to make my living, or keep in with my community, or eat my dinner—if you come to that!"

A long silence. Then Edith said icily:

"I really fail to see—I may not be clever—but I really fail to see why you should come home and be rude to me!"

Jack was silent in turn, fussing and plunging at his pillow. He tried to hook the thin, silk comforter into a complete cover for his long form; it slipped, hitched, slid to the floor. With a long sigh he sat up, reached for it, and scrambled under it again. Edith would never let him rest without covering.

"Your brother Fred is on the Entertainment Committee," he reminded Edith, finally, sitting hot and weary on the edge of his bed.

"Oh, Fred's wonderful!" Edith commented, with one of those sublime irrelevances that absolutely bewildered her husband. "We Rogerses are funny," she added, amusedly. "We fight like cats and dogs, I'll admit. But when it comes to loyalty——"

"You certainly fight like cats and dogs," Jack conceded, rolling over. He could feel her steely look boring into his back.

There was a rap at the door. They looked at each other.

"Your mother!" Edith breathed, patiently. "I really *do* think it is asking a good deal of me——! Who is it?" she asked, loudly.

"It's Mother, children." Mrs. Talbot opened the door, and looked apologetic. "You're resting!" she said, coming in. "But Fred just telephoned—and I knew you'd be interested! Clyde Bainbridge is engaged to the Kirby girl!"

Jack, sitting up again, staring at her a little blankly, told himself that he knew all this—he had expected it—there was neither shock nor surprise here.

"I don't believe it!" Edith said, flatly, bright spots of colour in her cheeks.

"She's going to the dinner to-night," pursued Mrs. Talbot. "Well, I can only say that I'm thankful that, on account of my mourning, I'm not going!"

"She *isn't!*" said Edith. "Why, the dinner's all arranged. How could they possibly change now?"

"That's what Mr. Bainbridge went to talk to Fred about. I suppose she'll be at your table—he was going to be, you know," Mrs. Talbot offered, reluctantly.

"Then I won't go!" Edith said, resolute and pale, after a brief silence in which she sat up, biting her lip, and staring angrily into space.

"Dear child, I'm afraid you'll *have* to go!" Mrs. Talbot said with a sort of mournful satisfaction.

"Rose Kirby—oh, isn't that the most preposterous thing you ever heard!" Edith said, laughing. "What on earth he sees in that girl—who was in our offices ——" she went on, trembling and scornful.

"She's extremely pretty, you know," Jack's mother offered, mildly.

"She's more than that," Jack said, without knowing he spoke.

"Not so much more but what she'll push herself into a group of people who are almost strangers to her, and

spoil everything!" Edith turned upon him to say, fiercely. "Who's going to chaperon her?"

"Why, your mother will be at the table, Edith, Amy, too, and what could they say?" Mrs. Talbot demanded, pathetically. "He's in the firm, you know."

"Did Mother promise to chaperon her?" Edith asked, sharply.

"Oh, talk sense!" Jack said, good-naturedly, bored and wearied once more by the empty words and words and words. "She doesn't need any chaperon in this town! Her grandfather would be one of the guests of honour if he was well enough, and she's engaged to Bainbridge, who is Toastmaster."

"Engaged to be married!" said Edith, scornfully, out of bitter musing. "He'll never marry her!"

Jack could be silent. But his mother protested:

"My dear, I'm afraid he will. He's the kind that knows his own mind. And if he does we will have to accept her, just for business reasons——"

"Yes, but that doesn't happen to be my code!" Edith said, youthfully, with a curl of her lip, and in the haughty, affected tone Jack knew so well. "And if you mean by knowing his own mind that Jack *didn't*, it's perfectly true, but I hardly see why that means that *I* should truckle to people like that!"

"What have you against her, Edith, except that I liked her?" Jack asked in his kindest, most reasonable tone.

"I have this against her," Edith answered, swiftly and forcefully, "that she's a common, ordinary girl, who tried to get you, because you were the richest man in town, and then when you threw her over, she goes right after the next catch she can get hold of! Poor

Mr. Bainbridge—he must be an absolute *fool!* She'll never come into my house, and if she joins the club, I'll resign! I won't associate with people like that, and you might as well know it now as any time! As for 'business considerations,'" Edith rushed on, with a sneer upon the quoted words, "before I'd accept Rose Kirby, I'd fire Bainbridge from the Iron Works —that's what *I'd* do! I wouldn't bootlick and agree and slave for a man like that, who didn't put one penny into the business—you wouldn't *catch* me!"

"Do you know, Jack, I should think you *would* let him go?" his mother seconded, with a thoughtful look.

"Bainbridge married!" was all Jack said, musingly. And he went into the bathroom, and they heard the plunge of the shower. Fire Bainbridge, he thought, almost genuinely amused in spite of all the pain and confusion and impatience in his heart. They were delicious—these women. Fire the man who owned a fifth of the business and who managed it all? Bainbridge was steady, smart, industrious, ambitious, devoted to the interests of the business; he knew more about it than any one else in the world. And Jack's mother and wife could talk airily of firing him!

The dinner and dance to-night were in full costume; Jack and Edith were going as a pioneer-days Chinese and his little Oriental wife. "Everyone'll be Spanish and early settler and Indian; there'll be twenty señoritas!" Edith, exulting in this inspiration, had said.

Now Jack picked up his flesh-coloured scalp cap with its dangling queue, his coarse coolie trousers and straw-soled shoes. But holding these things under his arm, and wrapped in his crash bathrobe, he fell to thinking, looking out under the big trees into the pleasant home

yard where the long shafts of sunlight still lay kindly upon the old fences and upon the blossoming shrubs and blazing borders, where the summerhouse stood in a very glory of wistaria and clematis, and the light came level and hot through the shaken, tremulous, pendent banners of the great pale blue iris that bordered the vegetable bed.

How pleasant the world was upon a warm spring afternoon, he thought, with all the kindly townspeople getting themselves clean and cool after the long, glorious day at the Dam, and the younger crowd giggling over sombreros and wampum! What would it be like to be free and young and happy and inconsequential—at liberty to play with all Gates Mill and be just Jack Talbot, the "old man's" somewhat spoiled young son, again?

Nothing else was as important as a subject of conversation, at the dinner that night, as the rumour of Clyde Bainbridge's engagement. Rosalind Kirby, for all her proud heritage, might have done anything she pleased without interesting the select group from Upper River and Harrison streets. But Bainbridge had made himself one of them; he dined at their tables, he was a prominent citizen, and the woman he had chosen to honour must be honoured by them all.

He came a little late, and he brought her with him. The others, perhaps two hundred persons in all, were circling about the long, decorated tables; the musicians were tuning up. There had been deep admiration for the girls, and Edith was in high feather at the recollection of Sally Pottle's blank face when the young Talbots came in; Edith had told Sally that she was coming

as a squaw! Edith was the only Chinese woman present, and everybody exclaimed over her costume, and gave her a chance to explain that the coat was real Mandarin, set with hundreds of tiny circular mirrors, and stolen from a walled city.

The Indians and squaws and the hoop-skirted women, and the saucy señoritas with their rosetted ears and fringed shawls, were all praised in turn; Mrs. Rogers, lazy and soft, had refused to come in costume, but some of the older men had belted their white linen clothes with scarlet, and assumed wide white hats and red neckerchiefs, and there was a perfect babel of excitement and admiration and laughter and motion.

Edith saw Rosalind enter; Jack saw her. Clyde was immediately introducing her to such women as she did not know, and she was holding her own with an astonishing, and Jack thought a charming, dignity. She wore a full, belled skirt of some soft old flowered silk, with a tight little gored basque, her hair was massed flat off her face, and a frail old lace scarf fell from a high comb about her shoulders. The other Spanish ladies immediately looked like what they had quite unconsciously impersonated: factory girls, girls of the town, commoners. Rosalind looked like a Castilian gentlewoman, a little severe, even a little dowdy, superbly beautiful, essentially and unmistakably Latin.

Jack thought he had never seen her look more exquisite; her figure's soft swells and curves, the flat hips, the firmly rounded arms, the beautifully modelled throat were startlingly set off by the old fashion and the old dress. And Edith knew, with a sick flash of jealous prescience, that everybody would court her, flatter her, compliment her to-night, that there would be little al-

lusions to her in the speeches, that when the old families of Gates Mill were toasted Rosalind would be the centre of all eyes.

Edith had had this sort of prominence and adulation all her life, without raising her hand to win it. But she hated this other girl to whom it had come, and she resented the fickle public favour that would so readily accord it. She, Edith Rogers Talbot, dancing into a successful marriage at eighteen, had been the darling of all hearts a few months ago. Everybody had loved her, praised her, admired her, envied her—young Mrs. Talbot of Gates Mill. She could not resign her supremacy without a bitter pang.

Some of the older women were a little stiff, at first, with the usurper. But Edith noted this did not last. Why should they not follow the fashion and accept the girl, if she really was so soon to be married and made one of themselves? Besides, she was pretty, and there never had been a word against her.

So Mrs. Raymond, and Mrs. Rudolph, and Mrs. Terry smiled at her, and told her that if she didn't look like something out of a book, nobody ever did! Could she find her place? She was right up there at the speakers' table, next to Mr. Bainbridge, but they guessed she knew that.

"The dress is an accident," explained Rosalind, in her pretty, friendly way. "It belongs, the whole thing, to old Mrs. Requa, out on the Summit Rock Road. And she wouldn't let me cut it, so I had to wear it just this way or get another whole costume!"

Her look wavered a little; Jack and Edith had come up.

"Hello, Jack," Rosalind said, showing no sign of

feeling except that her voice was a little breathless and the betraying colour rose in her face. She gave him her hand.

"You know my wife, Rose?" Jack said.

"How do you do, Mrs. Talbot? You know my sister, I think."

"Miss Kirby." They touched hands. "I don't remember," Edith said, looking about.

"Cecy? Cecilia Kirby, in Miss Mott's class?"

"I don't think I remember. I was sent to New York, you know."

"You've got a wonderful old costume there," Jack said, flushed under his brown skin, but not looking at his wife. "Isn't it, Edith? It looks like the real thing."

Rose explained interestedly once more that it belonged to old Mrs. Requa, out on the Summit Rock Road.

"And there are little hooks on the back of the comb, Jack, to catch the lace. She came all the way in to put it on for me to-night," said Rose.

"Jack, we have to take our places," Edith suggested, stiffly.

"I'll take you to yours, dear," he said, obediently, "but I see they've put me up at the speakers' table —I have to say something, you know!"

"If I had known that we were not going to sit together, I would not have come," Edith gritted between her teeth as they threaded the groups.

"I didn't know there was going to be a speakers' table, dear. But here, let me fix it with Fred, we can put you up there!" Jack said, anxiously.

"If you make any fuss about it—if you say another

word—I will never speak to you again!" Edith threatened, in a low, murderous tone. "Everyone's watching us——"

"Say," said Bozzy Terry, intercepting them, "I had to put Jack up at the long table, Ede, and I left you with your family, is that all right? Listen, Bainbridge wanted Miss Kirby up there. Say, what do you know about that, anyway? She is some beauty, I'll tell the waiting world. You could have knocked me over with a machine gun when Fred told me. Is it out?"

"No, Bozzy, wherever you put me is fine," Edith said, graciously and obligingly. "It'll do Jack good to miss me for once!"

"Say, that's the way to train your wife, Jack; how do you do it? Beat her?" Bozzy exclaimed, appreciatively. "If you knew the fuss most of 'em are making, Ede, you'd realize why I adore you. Why aren't there any more like her, Jack, you big hog, grabbing her before she was out of baby clothes!"

"I don't think there's anything in the Bainbridge engagement," Edith said, pleasantly, walking off with Bozzy; "for her sake, it would be a wonderful thing; she seems such a sweet girl! But I have a sort of feeling——"

Somebody tweaked Jack's queue; he came out of a dream and went slowly to his own place.

He and Rosalind were not near each other, he had but a vague impression of the speeches, the applause, the courses that came and went. He told himself that he was unusually tired. But as the party broke up, some of the elders already homeward bound, some of the visitors already talking of trains, but almost everyone

planning to go to the dance in the Square, he had a few words alone with Rosalind.

Clyde was deep in conversation with some committee or sub-committee. Rosalind, a little weary, perhaps, her brown coat over her arm, had been talking to the Newmans; now as the doctor and his portly little Carmen-costumed wife turned away, Jack came up.

"Is this true about you and Bainbridge, Rose?"

She raised her eyes, and their blueness was all his for a long minute. There was an expression of gentleness, of vagueness, of something questioning, like a child's look, in them.

"That we are to be married? Oh, yes," she said, slowly.

"Rose, will you let me wish you all the joy in the world?" he asked, with his lowered voice trembling a little.

Promptly her warm, soft, strangely vital hand was in his.

"But—of course, Jack!"

They stood for a moment, close together, as they had stood so many times, but separated now so irrevocably. Rose felt, in this hour that should have been one of triumph, merely a little dazed and stupid, oddly unable to analyze what she felt—unable even to feel very keenly. Jack looked down at the beautiful, budding figure, the lowered dark lashes against cheeks that were like flawless velvet, the massed rich burned-gold hair, he felt the grip of her warm, soft fingers, and a sort of vague ache came into his heart.

"You're pretty sure of yourself, Rose?" he asked, unexpectedly, and with a thick, nervous little laugh. "You know—you know—a person gets carried away, sort of—in this sort of thing——"

His awkwardness awakened a smile exquisitely maternal.

"Ah, but that's just it, Jack," she answered, innocently. "I'm not being carried away—this time. I'm perfectly calm about it. It is the right and the wise thing to do, and Mom—and everybody—is delighted about it!"

"Yes, but maybe you *ought* to be carried away and not see it so calmly!" Jack persisted, unhappily, more alarmed than he was aware by her quiet, rational manner, and speaking with instinctive protest.

"Ah——" she breathed quickly, and stopped short. "There isn't much happiness in mere *cases!*" she assured him. "That boy-and-girl feeling never lasts—never leads to anything!"

They looked at each other, looked away, and stood close together without speaking for a minute, Rosalind looking down at the hand that his big one was still holding and fingering absent-mindedly.

"I—suppose—not," he said, slowly. And suddenly it seemed to him that Rose, and his youth in happy, sleepy, simple little Gates Mill, were all his life, and that both were dying. "Good luck!" he said, not looking at her.

"Thank you, Jack," she answered, clearing her throat, and in a low voice. She did not raise her eyes. And immediately Clyde returned, claimed her, and led her away.

"I think I am going to scold you a little, dear," Edith, who had been very silent on the return trip in her father's car, said suddenly when she was at her dressing table.

Jack said nothing. A deep weariness and boredom possessed him. She was in that mood, was she?

"I am going to ask you," Edith went on, with a suddenly heightened colour and in a rising tone, "not to make me conspicuous by your attentions to any other woman. I'm sorry to say this, Jack, but I think for both our sakes it is kinder to say it, dispassionately and once and for all. No matter how common a woman is, no matter how she goes out of her way to attract attention—I don't blame her for it, her beauty is one of her decided assets——"

"Do you mean Rose Kirby?" Jack asked, in a controlled voice, as she paused. Edith gave a little exultant and triumphant laugh.

"Aha, the shoe fits, does it?" she asked, shrewdly. "Poor old Jack!" said Edith, crossing the room to her bureau now, and stopping to lay her arm about his shoulders, as he sat bent over his shoe laces, and rest her flat, cool cheek against his temple.

She never offered embraces or showed him any true affection, and this sudden display of superiority and of having forced him to betray himself made something like fury rise within him. Even here, in their own bedroom, Edith still kept up her affectations.

"I supposed it must be," he said, lifelessly. "When you mentioned beauty," he added, not unwilling to annoy her in turn.

Edith apparently did not hear him; she had put away her jewellery and returned to the dressing table.

"America's funny," she said now, dreamily. "In Europe," added Edith, with sudden vigour, "of course one would never even *meet* such a girl. Toadying everybody, hanging 'round Mrs. Terry and Mamma, smiling, bowing—working her eyes—it made me sick!"

"Absolutely dependent upon you, too, you know," she added, as Jack, at last recalling that silence was the one argument she could not meet, the one position she could not shake, the one thing, indeed, that she dreaded from him, proceeded with his undressing in silence. "You could fire the man to-morrow, and then where would she be? Just where she always has been, in Old Mill Lane, with that delightful family of crazy people——

"And the time may come," proceeded Edith, now occasionally sending the silent Jack a provocative glance, "the time may come when I shall say to you, in all fairness, that I think you ought to get rid of Clyde Bainbridge. I don't ask much—and be assured that I shouldn't ask *that* without deep consideration. Consideration of your mother's position as a shareholder, of my own position as your wife, and of my father's position as the banker who is back of the Iron Works——

"Oh, dear me!" said Edith, with a laugh, in a dead silence, "it was so funny to-night. She—poor child—was so funny! Trying so hard to make a nice impression——!"

There were some books on a bookshelf beside his bed; Jack looked at them. The new magazines; but Edith never discussed books or magazines, or anything else that did not expressly and personally touch herself. Flowers, music, general cheerful conversation, history, politics, social economics, did not exist to her. She had one topic, and she rang the changes upon it inexhaustibly.

He thought wearily to-night that it would be wonderful to be congenial, friendly, companionable with one's

wife; to be able to speak to her as if she were a normal human being, not a person always to humour, to whom to adjust oneself stupidly and painfully over and over and over again.

"I beg your pardon," he said, established in his pillows now, with his night-light beside him. She had flung some abrupt question at him.

"Oh—h—h—!" Edith gritted, in a sort of animal snarl, coming close to him in her wrapper, with her thin hair in a pigtail on her shoulder and her small face pale with rage. "Oh, you *beast*—you selfish, cold-blooded beast. If people knew what you are! I give you everything—everything——!" gasped Edith, panting, "my youth—my freedom—my girlhood—all, all—I sacrifice to you, to your cruelty and your indifference! Other men—other men have begged me on their knees —other men have found me worth listening to—oh, you vile——"

"Now, look here, now, look here," Jack said, mildly, getting out of bed and pinioning her by her thin little arms. "This is no way to do——"

"You let me go or I'll kill myself!" Edith said, in a sort of repressed scream, "I swear I will! Don't you touch me——"

This would last, he knew, for about ten minutes. Then she would weaken into floods of luxurious tears. Then she would strain him to her little flat breast, and kiss him convulsedly, and call herself all the contemptible things she could muster—she was a beast—she went mad like that sometimes, she saw red— "we Rogerses aren't like other people," she would say, "when we love we're just like savages!"

It all bored him so terribly. Her rages, her tears, her

theatricals, her scenes. Words, words, words—and all about herself.

Finally she would insist upon his getting into a big chair and would curl herself penitently into his arms and talk baby talk. And if one thing chilled Jack more than another it was that.

"Is yitter Edie a norfer naughty dirl?" she would demand, laughingly. He would feel his mouth bitter and his throat dry, he would feel himself a thousand years old as he answered her. "But, Jack, you will always have to put up with these fire-and-ice moods in me, and you must always be my stern big brother and just shake me out of them when they come," she would assure him, seriously. "I can't help them—something just seems to split in my head and I—well, I see red. And hope," Edith would add, modestly, "that some of the other things that people admire in me, my tennis and golf, and my being a good pal, and the fact that I simply *can't* lie, or do anything petty or contemptible, sort of makes it up to my big husband?"

And she would ramble on happily into school memoirs of her own generosity and her own bigness, while Jack, wearied beyond words, chilled through and through, bored to actual pain, sleepy and cramped, continued to hold her in his arms, actually afraid to suggest that as the hour was late, and her communications supremely unimportant, they might be wise to go to bed.

CHAPTER XVII

Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Bainbridge returned from their honeymoon upon a certain Tuesday in mid-August, slipping quietly into Gates Mill in their own motor car, and taking possession of the Bainbridge house above the old quarry without any of their townspeople being aware that they had returned.

They were a little earlier than their schedule had indicated; Clyde had said something to Rosalind's mother about "two weeks," but upon the particular Tuesday of their coming back they had been married not quite ten days.

"Ten wonderful days!" Rosalind said to her husband, smilingly, when the white walls of the Terry Mills began to take shape, "but what a pity to come home in such a horrible fog!"

For one of the rare summer fogs had poured in upon the wide valley through gaps in the coast range, oceanward, and the town was smothered in its thick folds, chill, mysterious, concealing.

Rose looked at it distressedly; somehow it cooled her happy, idle mood, to leave the sunny, lazy south, where they had been so contentedly cruising, and find themselves starting the new life seriously, as man and wife, in this queer, dripping, shadowy, cold world.

"But turn down this way, Clyde," she reminded him, while they were still in the car. "Aren't we going down to see Mom?"

"Not immediately?" he asked, with a surprised side glance. "Home first, with these bags."

"All right, home first," she conceded. But her heart strained almost physically toward Old Mill Lane; it had been her first absence from home, after all, and she had missed her mother and sisters. She knew that she would not feel quite right until they had had their first talk, their first laughing and crying and hugging.

But she and Clyde had turned their back upon the old neighbourhood, and were immediately safe from observation under the drooping eucalyptus, and behind the big, overgrown rough evergreen hedge of the Bainbridge yard. The hedge had been trimmed into a block up to a certain point; above this it bulged with thick, stuffy green; below it the woody dry branches had been exposed. It completely closed the street side of the premises.

The property was almost three acres, heavily wooded with the planted trees that had made the house only a delicate shelter forty years ago. There were willows, peppers, cypress, eucalyptus, the tall shafts of pears and poplars, thick stocky bushes of lilac and syringa and pampas grass, laurustinus and bull pines. At one side was a tall fence, shutting off the sharp drop of the cliff that descended to the old quarry; there were a few barns and sheds, and a windmill.

On three sides of the house, the effect of all this dark, rank growth, especially when, as to-day, it was veiled and dripping silently with fog, was smothering—confining—suffocating. Rosalind found the word "stuffy" in her mind as Minnie Carter opened the front door for them, and they walked into a dark, neat hall floored with oilcloth over drugget.

But when she crossed a sitting room she mentally characterized as "unspeakable," to part clean Nottingham curtains and look out on the quarry side of the house, she found that the cliff had been cut away to a space actually within a few feet of the window, and that below her everything fell away abruptly to the empty pits and excavations fifty feet below.

The quarry was abandoned now, perhaps for the obvious reason that a very little more drilling would have brought the Bainbridge house down in a rush of wreckage into State Street. The house was braced with great beams from below, and Rosalind learned later that the senior Bainbridge had had a bitter lawsuit before he had been able to arrest the threatening activities of the rock merchants.

But vines had draped themselves over the ugly beams and Rose already thought that she would like this aspect of the town; it was the poorest residential district truly, and showed only factories and old docks and piers along the little river, but it was at least alive. And even now she sensed that there would be hours when her new home took on a strangely uncomfortable quality of being something less than living.

It was in Santa Clara Street, a small crooked lane that arched away from Harrison Street, which in its turn was close to Upper River Street, so that, conventionally speaking, the Bainbridge house was correct enough. But the lane itself was quiet and lonely, with the deserted old Pierce mansion occupying one whole side of it, and what with the unfriendly hedge, and the garden full of umbrageous shadows, slippery spaces needle-carpeted under the pines, harsh shrubs and woody bushes choking the paths, and almost all the

tight-shuttered windows of the house looking out into the shabby, ungroomed lower branches of trees, Rose had not been ten minutes in her new home before she had begun to take real comfort from the thought of the quarry window.

The house was stern, narrowly built of brick covered with slate-gray cement. It was in fine preservation, and the dark, restricted rooms were all fully and completely and finally furnished. No redeeming touches to be added here, no frivolous stencilled furniture or peacock chintzes. There was nothing to do with the Bainbridge house, Rose thought, between laughter and impatience, except live in it and hate it!

The parlours had body Brussels carpets from wall to wall; lace curtains, rep curtains, heavy, good furniture in horsehair or rep, with smooth walnut knobs and scrolls everywhere. Back of the parlours, or rather the four-square rooms that were parlours, library, and study, was a long dining room, crossing the house. This room had a polished yellow oak wainscot, and a polished yellow oak floor, white half-curtains at the windows, an oak drop-head sewing machine inconspicuously placed against one wall. There were large still-life paintings: fruit with claret in a glass and a red-fringed napkin, and dead pheasants, dead trout, dead rabbits arranged about an overturned basket.

There was something about the cleanness, the yellowness, the neatness of the dining room that made Rosalind almost faint. The room had a quality that actually appalled her. In later days she occupied herself with more or less futile plans for almost every other room in the house, but the dining room seemed to her, even on first inspection, hopeless.

Upstairs were walnut double beds, flat and white and cool, steel-rodded small grates a size smaller than those downstairs, and quite obviously useless, so many bureaus, so many chairs. The woodwork was dark, the wallpapers dull greenish grays and chocolate browns, the door knobs brown shiny china.

It all had that same quality, so infinitely disturbing to her, of utter order and cleanness. The carpets were speckless, the towels hung evenly, chairs stood against walls; there was not a flower in the place.

Rose felt a little weary, a little jaded; they had driven almost two hundred miles since breakfast; it was four o'clock in the afternoon. She and Clyde had visited Monterey and Santa Cruz on their trip, Santa Barbara and Santa Maria, and she still felt in her veins the leisure-loving hunger of the traveller, the desire for new roads, new inns, strange bills-of-fare, strange new dreams while the countryside unrolled like a scroll about her, and Clyde watched gauges and meters and speedometer keenly.

Even for her modest wardrobe the narrow little closet with its single row of hooks was inadequate; she lay resting on the flat, hard bed, while Clyde moved about unpacking and straightening everything.

"Use that monstrous extra bureau for some of the clothes," she suggested from the bed.

"Good idea!" He was in his shirt sleeves, genuinely interested in the problem of disposing of all their clothes and possessions. He looked sharply at the window, against which the fog was booming softly, strained through tree branches.

"I ought to get up and go and see Mom," Rosalind said, as if lazily. Her heart was springing, tearing,

hungering toward her mother, no fatigue would have kept her from that first call and that longed-for hour. But Clyde had been insistent that she should rest, and Rosalind was beginning quite unconsciously to think what Clyde's attitude toward any subject might be before she committed herself upon it.

He looked at her from the table where he was methodically matching shoes.

"Won't to-morrow be time enough?" he asked.

"You're joking? " Rosalind laughed.

"Joking?" he echoed, quickly. "I hope *you* are!"

"Why, but Clyde," she argued, still smiling, "of course I shall have to see Mom to-day!"

"Why, 'of course'?" he asked.

"But, my dear—think how hurt they'd be if I didn't!"

"Ah, now you're arguing from their side of it, Rose. If you mean simply that they'd be hurt, you're unreasonable, for they don't yet know you are in town!"

"Yes, but they will know it!"

"Not necessarily. You go in, in a day or two——"

"In a *day* or two!"

"Well, to-morrow if you want to," Clyde agreed after a second's pause. "I'm perfectly willing to concede that. But I shall certainly protest if you have any idea of going down there to-day. In the first place, I sent the car over to the garage to be thoroughly cleaned. In——"

"Clyde! Six or seven blocks! When I used to walk a mile to the Mills every day!"

"You are worn out, tired and dirty," he pursued, inflexibly. "Minnie is heating water for baths. I couldn't *possibly* go with you, anyway——"

"Oh, but why not? Just for five minutes?"

"I have all my mail here, Rose, I shall be working

almost all night. Telephone your mother if you want to——"

She would not persist. She had just had a wonderful trip, and twenty-four hours earlier or later for her visit home were inconsiderable. Mom was the least exacting of women, and if Mom were satisfied, and Clyde satisfied, then it must be Rosalind who was at fault.

"I suppose Minnie hasn't enough food to ask them to come up and have dinner with us?" she suggested, suddenly, off guard.

He looked at her, astounded.

"My *goodness*, Rose!" he exclaimed, genuinely amazed. "Minnie has got everything in order, kept the place like a pin, and undoubtedly has some special meal under way, and you——"

"Yes, I know, of course!" Rose murmured, apologetically. She lay quite still, with closed eyes, until Clyde went downstairs, and Minnie came to the door to say abruptly:

"I think you can get hot water, now, Mrs. Bainbridge. The cold fasset makes a turrible noise, but Clipper's boys says it won't do no hurt. How's all folks down your way?"

"I should think you would know better than I, Minnie," Rose answered, eagerly, sitting up to put her feet on the floor, and looking, as Minnie told a friend at the movies that night, "like a young one of about eight, with her hair all hanging 'round."

Minnie expanded. Aggie Parrott's uncle had died, and everyone said that Miss Perkins was secretly married to Walt Fury. That lot next to Palley's—it was thus that the Palais Royal was designated by half the population of Gates Mill—that lot next to Palley's——

"Minnie! Where's the tack hammer?" Clyde shouted from below. Minnie hurriedly departed, murmuring, "Where in tunket——" and Rosalind went to take her bath in a big, boxed zinc tub in the dark, wood-panelled bathroom. She fussed at the old-fashioned bureau that already seemed inconvenient after the light-encircled dressing tables at the big hotels, and went down to dinner at half-past six. Clyde, who had washed his hands in the under-stairs lavatory, was reading a heap of letters and catalogues as he waited.

Rose felt clean and comfortable, and while she was actually counting the hours until she should see her mother, she was resigned to the delay and sufficiently interested by the novelty of the new situation to be smiling.

"Rose, just a suggestion——" Clyde said, glancing at her from the pages of a machinists' magazine.

She eyed him expectantly.

"I merely wanted to ask that you don't gossip with Minnie," Clyde said. "It's bad for her, you know. She's quite sufficiently willing to become slack and familiar as it is. And it isn't—it isn't just the thing that will be expected of you, now, you know."

The blood came into Rose's face. His thirty-four years had even before this seemed a rather appalling and oppressive over-balancing of her twenty-two, but there had been no occasion for anything so chilling and so authoritative before.

Minnie put on two swaying plates of a rather indeterminate soup, remarking: "All ready!" She passed sliced stale bread. Rosalind looked about the clean yellow room and up at the dead fish and bloody rabbits, and out of the thin tall mullioned windows, where the

fog boomed and shifted softly, dripping, dripping, dripping, and told herself that she was absurd to feel suddenly so lonely and so weary, and so young—so much in need of her mother.

The next morning, when he left for the office, Clyde asked her if she was going out to-day.

"Oh, yes, I'm dressed now! I thought I'd straighten the room, and talk to Minnie about meals, and then go home!"

"Home?" Clyde repeated, with a straight, steadily smiling look.

"Well, no, of course not! This is home. Of course! But to see Mom."

"What time will you be back?"

"Why—I don't know, Clyde. I may—yes, I guess I will stay for lunch!"

"But you told Minnie to have eggs for lunch."

"No, I didn't, dear—at least, not exactly. She asked me if I wanted an egg for breakfast, and I said no, but I liked them at lunch. And then she said, 'How?' and I said poached, and she said she would poach me some to-day. But it's simple enough to tell her——'

"Don't upset her routine any more than you have to, Rose, will you?"

Flushed and self-conscious, yet with her eagerness to please him struggling through, Rose answered quickly:

"No, of course I won't!"

"All right!" Clyde nodded, looked critically at the porch and steps, and shouted, "Minnie!"

"Let me tell her!" Rosalind suggested, lingering in the doorway.

"No, thanks!" he said, briefly. He stood waiting,

with an oddly stern and discontented face until Minnie, curious, breathless, and wiping her hands on her apron, appeared. "Minnie," said Clyde then, frowning, "how long has Johnson been leaving that rake out all night?"

Minnie shook her head, sighed, made a tut-tutting sound with her tongue, descended with a swoop upon the rake, and departed about the corner of the house, carrying it.

"You tell Johnson I want to see him!" Clyde shouted, after her. He got into his car, pulled on his gloves, and without another glance at Rosalind, drove away.

But Rosalind was but twenty-two, inexacting and unanalytical. She turned into the house interestedly, and just half an hour later she whirled in upon her mother and Cecy, Audrey and her grandfather, and kissed them and laughed and cried over them like a mad woman.

Mrs. Kirby was washing breakfast dishes, Cecy was dawdling about supposedly drying them, Audrey was hopping about the kitchen like a detached and curious robin, and the old man seated at the kitchen table, nicely mending a saucepan cover with a screw, a nut, and a cork. Mrs. Connor was pressing some facing carefully at the larger table.

They cast aside their various avocations as Rose burst in, and there was pandemonium for almost an hour. Rose sat in her mother's lap, with Audrey on the table close beside her and Cecy kneeling on the floor in front, and with almost every phrase the visitor leaned forward or up to kiss one or the other of the beloved faces.

"You should have let your mother know you was

going away, Rose," her grandfather said, mildly. "It's an awful thing for a girl like you to run off like that! You weren't married, were you?" old Nat Tallifer questioned her, a little anxious frown between his magnificent old blue eyes. He gathered the full curtain of his beard in one massive old hand and squared the gigantic breadth of his shoulders.

Rose had to spring from her mother's arms to go over and kiss him.

"We had your postcards. Dory says you went almost a thousand miles," Cecy mumbled, biting Rose's hand softly, and repeating, "You old darling!" now and then under her breath.

"About eight hundred. Oh, we had a wonderful trip!" Rose assured her. "I wanted you all so!"

"Yes, you did!" Kate Connor, loath to return to the dark front parlour, and her dressmaking, said significantly.

"Oh, but I did! Oh, Cecy, if you could see Santa Barbara! And the Missions—I took photographs with your darling camera, Audrey."

"I gave it to you because it was a present, and you were married!" Audrey stated with satisfaction.

"You darling, of course you did! And every time I took a picture I thought of you!"

"Had your suit pressed, didn't you, Rose?" Kate Connor said.

"Oh, twice! Doesn't it look nice? It's been so satisfactory! But everything was, for that matter. My little silk wrapper, and the white hat—everything. Oh, and Mom, we went on the Seventeen Mile Drive, along the ocean shore—you'd love it so!"

"And where's Mr. Bainbridge, dear?" Mrs. Kirby,

who stood somewhat in awe of her son-in-law, asked interestedly.

"He had to go right to the office, Mom, but he told me to give you all his love, and all that!" Rose answered, readily. And she had an odd little minute of realization. "Doesn't it seem funny for me to be married to the vice-president of the Works?" she thought. In the confusion of the last few weeks at home it had been easy to forget this, and during the past ten days she had been so completely out of the home atmosphere as almost to feel herself another woman.

Aloud the conversation went on joyfully, and Rose looked strangely at the nicked and scorched brown dish in which her mother was making an apple tapioca pudding, and at Cecy in the worn-out dotted red waist that had been Rose's for three years, and at Audrey with the big teeth pushing each other crooked in her wide little smiling mouth.

"Are we going to have lunch in the kitchen or in the dining room?" she asked, when Ned came in, at half-past eleven, to rumple her hair affectionately and tell her that to have someone downtown ask if his sister "Mrs. Bainbridge" was back was "hot dog!"

"Oh, my gracious, you'll be too grand to eat here in my dirty old kitchen, my married daughter with a rich husband and a big house and a car!" her mother protested. Rose protested in return: Mom *please* wasn't to talk as if there was any difference! But the words gave her a pleasant little thrill, nevertheless.

"Why didn't she ring up yesterday?" Ned presently asked the others, evidently pursuing some previously discussed topic.

"Oh, Mom, darling, did you know we got home yesterday?" Rosalind asked, her gay stream of talk instantly arrested, and her guilty eyes on her mother. She had more than half implied a late evening return.

"They saw you drive past the flour mills," Cecy told her, "and Bozzy telephoned me! Heavens, Ned," she added to her brother, witheringly, "you are a Babbling Bess!"

"I understood, of course, you were both tired and dusty. Get another loaf of bread, Audrey!" Mrs. Kirby said, lovingly. "Why, my darling, do you suppose we didn't know you wanted to be with us the first instant you could?"

Perhaps Rose was already contrasting this attitude with some other, perhaps she had already begun to learn to appreciate what was merely kind, uncritical, self-effacing, and what she had taken for granted for years in her mother. She put her arms about her mother and kissed her as she never had kissed her in their lives before. The gentle, gray, mildly inefficient woman in the purple gingham looked at her lovingly, with eyes through which shone nothing but anxiety to make her, and all the children, happy.

"Mother, do you know that you are the most wonderful person alive?" Rose asked, laughing through tears. "And it's so good to be home again!"

"Strange thing that particular office should burn that particular day!" her grandfather said to her, significantly. "I suppose your sister told you my office, and all my papers, was burned?" he added. "Molly, why didn't you tell this very lovely young lady that we had quite a fire in River Street?" he added, sociably.

"I'm terribly sorry, Grandpa dear," Rose said,

sympathetically. "Jam, Ned," she added, in an aside.

"You ain't interested in machinery," the old man rambled on, watching anxiously Audrey's greedy helping of jam. "But we've got a little specialty here in Gates Mill—the 'Centipede.' Heard of it?"

"The farm tractor? I should say I have!" Rose assured him, warmly. "Mom, did Ag's uncle finally die?"

"Say, listen, this is what I heard last night, at the concert," Cecy began. Audrey departed squawking into the yard, Ned disappeared. Kate Connor cleared an end of the table for her pressing, and the women composed themselves for a long talk. "Rose, it seems as if it was all a dream, your getting married and all!" Cecy said, with one more embrace. "Rose, is it fun?"

"Cecy——!" her mother reproved her. Kate Connor shrugged. "That young one always was a holy terror!" had long been Kate's comment upon Cecy. But Rose laughed.

"Well—you remember years ago we were talking about how funny it was that no matter how poor you were, or how unhappy, you wouldn't change place with any one if you had to change characters, too?" she asked. The older women exchanged a fleet glance, listening attentively. "It's rather like that," Rose went on, smiling a little puzzledly. "You do change. Everything changes. Don't you think so, Mom?"

"Well, that feeling that you are walking on air, and as if you were just too happy to live—that don't last, Rose," the widow Connor said, thoughtfully. "I'll never forget when Mart Connor and I took a three-room house—it wasn't nothing but a shanty really—in Marysville. There were roses all over the door, and

we had ham and eggs for our first ten meals, I guess, for that was all I could cook! Finally I says, 'Mart, I guess you're getting pretty sick of ham and eggs, aren't you?' And he says—he says—'Why, you go on cookin' 'em better and better, Kate——'"

Homely, awkward, fifty, her face reddened youthfully. She flung herself down at the table, weeping, and Cecy put a comforting hand upon her shoulder.

"He was just a saint, and I knew all along that we were too happy!" the dressmaker said, suddenly straightening, and blowing her nose and wiping her eyes vigorously. "I had been so lonely as a girl, and somehow to have Mart, so kind and so generous, taking care of Ellie and me——"

"Well, that was the way with Mr. Kirby," said his widow with sympathetic tears moistening her own eyes. "He never lost that goodness—thinking of me first, and—I don't know—so companionable! Seems like we couldn't walk down to River Street but we wouldn't get laughing, and many a night we'd sit at the table until eleven o'clock——"

"Well, I want to be the first to congratulate you two on the cheerful conversation you select for a bride!" Cecy said, looking from one tearful woman to the other. Both began to laugh, and Rose laughed, too. But she remembered the conversation many times afterward without laughter.

Marriage, from her standpoint, was indeed no laughing matter. It had its good qualities, its hard qualities, it was nothing like what she had fancied it would be, good or bad. She never cried, but there were days when she did not laugh.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was increasingly and eternally amazing for Rosalind to find herself here in the dark house of carpets and curtains, of dreary windows opening into dank shrubbery, married. She would have speculated gaily enough over the situation a few years, hardly more than a few months, ago. But she had been Rose Kirby then.

Now she was Mrs. Clyde Bainbridge. The trades people called her that, and she had accounts at the drug store and at Bond & Hellman's, and it was all taken quietly for granted. Just one of the marriages of the year.

She had a husband—a prosperous, respected, nice-looking man, clean and faithful and responsible, a man who never looked at another woman, and who never would, who paid all his bills promptly, drove a nice car, and stood something more than well before his community. Clyde was exceptionally successful, unusually admired.

There was her house, her good servant, her substantial, pretty clothes, her undeniable youth and beauty; and this was her home town where everybody knew and loved her.

She and Clyde shared one of the enormous, flat walnut beds, in one of the dark upstairs rooms. They got up at seven, and while they dressed he usually talked pleasantly of business affairs, or of some small household matter. They descended half-an-hour later to coffee

and stewed fruit and bakers'-bread toast, and then Clyde went away.

Then Rose usually said to Minnie:

"How about dinner?"

And Minnie usually replied:

"He said the mutton."

Rose might then say:

"You can manage everything?"

"Oh, sure," Minnie would reply easily. "I'll foam if I need onions or anything!

"He's sort of fussy, Mr. Bainbridge," Minnie sometimes added, loyally, "but he certainly does appreciate what you do for him!"

Rose would then go quietly upstairs to make her bed, and do such straightening, dusting, or darning as seemed necessary. Once a week Minnie came upstairs for a thorough cleaning which she quite soberly described as "raring and tearing."

"I'll have to rare and tear to-morrow, if Thursday's Thanksgiving," Minnie, said, in the fall.

Thus Rose's domestic responsibilities were light. At ten she would walk downtown; four times a week she lunched with her mother.

These were her happiest times, times of such exquisite freedom and relaxation that it was inevitable that Rose should presently quite innocently find herself saying: "Ah, Mom, I never knew how wonderful home was, nor how I love you all!"

She would walk home at four o'clock; Clyde came in at about half-past five. Rosalind might be busily working with her French lesson. She would follow him upstairs, with wifely concern for his fatigue or his worries. They would presently come down, to talk amiably and

quietly over their dinner. Then Clyde usually worked, and Rosalind sewed contentedly enough, or read Dickens and Thackeray, whose works with many others filled the old bookcases in the library.

"Sleepy?" he would ask her pleasantly when she laid down her book or yawned. Sometimes he asked her to wait for him, and thanked her for her graciousness, as they went, chilly and weary, upstairs, snapping off lights. Often she went upstairs alone.

But there were occasionally halcyon nights when Clyde worked at the office, and Rosalind then fled home for dinner, laughed and chattered over the family dinner table so infectiously that the others found themselves in wild spirits, too, and took Cecy and Ned, and perhaps her mother and Audrey, to whatever entertainment the town offered.

"Oh, please, Mom, it's the Odd Fellows! And it's such fun to be just ourselves again!" And she would buy the best seats, and treat them all afterward to as many sundaes as were safe, or even more.

"Pretty smooth, having all the money you want to spend," Ned commented more than once. Rosalind found it gratifying, herself, to break five-dollar bills so easily, to take Cecy the little waist from Bond's window for which she thirsted, to have absolutely no uneasiness on the score of expenses. She did not know what her own household expenses were; but whatever they were, they were safe. Clyde never questioned her about her allowance. And presently he himself suggested that she send her mother a new lawn mower, as a gift.

He watched money matters with a closeness that astonished her; even in the Kirby house nickels and dimes flowed with an easier grace than in the Bainbridge

mansion. Clyde never wasted, and never lost control; anything might be worth its price to him, as witness the lawn mower and the motor car he drove, but he never lost sight of the price.

When, a few weeks after their return home, she talked to him of alterations in the house, of white woodwork and colonial chintzes, he listened attentively if without enthusiasm, and then advised her to find out about what all these changes would cost. The sale of the old walnut furniture would bring in practically nothing, and if she changed one room in the house she would surely want to change all.

"Besides, it's all solid and good, Rose; you can't buy furniture like it, and in another ten years it will all come into fashion again," he prophesied. "Somehow the house itself doesn't seem fitted to decoration!"

Rose had to admit that he was right. Not only the house, but the garden would have to be torn out bodily before daintiness and freshness could come in. The carpets must come up, the curtains down, paperers must scrape and tear for weeks, floors must be relaid, all the woodwork coated three times with cream paint, and even then they would have a mere shell, without one article of suitable furniture, and a shell whose unchangeable shape was not promising for any scheme of decoration.

"I suppose it would cost a thousand dollars?" she mused, wistfully.

"A thousand! Get some estimates, Rose, and see what you'd have left of ten thousand!" Clyde said, not unsympathetically. This was final. Ten thousand dollars was a fortune; it would be actually wicked to

squander it so. Rose resigned the immediate prospect of re-making the house, regretting most that it robbed her of a great outlet for her unspent energies and a delightful occupation for her spare time.

Other things struck deeper. Clyde was perfectly definite about such hospitality as was expected from Rose by her family. Certainly she was to ask them to dinner, Cecy, Ned, her mother, her grandfather, little Audrey. What night?

"Well, I hadn't thought of it in exactly that way, I suppose. I thought of them—sort of coming in whenever they wanted to—as——"

"As *what?*" he asked, as she hesitated.

"As nothing!" she said, laughing, and rousing from a half-formed dream in which Ned, Cecy, Mom, and Grandpa were incessantly coming and going in the house in Santa Clara Street. Of course, that wouldn't do—she was married now—everyone said that this family question was a pitfall for domestic happiness. She would have liked to share everything she had with them. No matter; all this would adjust itself. Clyde hated slipshod entertaining—"putting on an extra place," "taking pot luck."

On the evening when Ned loitered in his sister's home until supper time, and Rose quite innocently asked him to stay for the meal, Clyde was civil but firm. He told Rose that if the boy did that again he himself would tell him frankly that he was unwelcome.

One of the weaknesses of her character, now suddenly discovered, was that she could not face controversy. She wanted Mom to like Clyde, and Clyde to like her family, and everything to be harmonious and pleasant. So she immediately constituted herself a buffer between

their different temperaments, and achieved diplomacy almost overnight.

She formed the habit of lingering in her mother's kitchen in the winter afternoons; Ned and Cecy began to expect to find her there, and sometimes the atmosphere of merriment and congeniality was so enthralling that Rose hated to leave, to run through dark Old Mill Lane, and through the end of River Street with its lights, and so through State Street and past the quarry, and up the old collapsing wooden stairs, arriving breathless in her own cedar-scented dark garden only ten or fifteen minutes before Clyde got home.

If Ned, in an unwonted mood of chivalry, offered to escort her, she would cheerfully refuse.

"No, Clyde's simply dead with overwork, and he wants his wife to himself!" she would say.

But it was on one of these nights, a night just before Christmas, when Cecy was deep in present making, and Audrey pencilling long lists for Santa Claus, and when the old house fairly hummed with homely warmth and young life, that she found herself for the first time formulating the astonishing question: "Why?"

Why had she married, and marrying, why Clyde? What were the motives that had actuated her in taking so extraordinary a step so short a time ago? She had forgotten them entirely.

Women married. But why? She had known absolutely nothing about him; most girls knew nothing about the men they married. She had not been carried away; it was all logical and reasonable enough.

It had all been, perhaps, too reasonable. And it was reasonable still. Clyde was never unkind to her, indeed he was always extremely kind. He planned

for her, thought for her, gave her presents, was undoubtedly proud of her. He maintained a comfortable if ugly home, paid a good servant, and there were many times when he and Rosalind talked along quite comfortably on various subjects, perhaps took their luncheon and the car and spent a Sunday in the hills, or went to a Gates Mill festivity: "Young Mr. and Mrs. Bainbridge, and aren't they stunning together?"

But Rosalind had only to be her real self for five minutes to anger and antagonize him into a cold sort of fury that she early learned to anticipate and avoid. If she wanted Cecy to go with them, if she wanted to stop on the way home and see Mom, he froze at once.

Her young voice, raised in a shop, infuriated him by "making him conspicuous." She came to hate the phrase. Rosalind, asking young Jim Cudworth, in the garage, how his baby was, was "making Clyde conspicuous." Almost any plan of hers was impracticable.

"Shall we stop and make our dinner call on the Raymonds?"

"Not now."

"But, Clyde, why not? We're both dressed, and I've got cards."

"Not this afternoon."

They would drive on, Rosalind already schooled in the difficult art of holding her tongue. After all, what difference did it make, since he felt that way about it? Plenty of time to pay calls!

One day she moved into new positions the furniture in the downstairs rooms where they usually spent their evenings, with his crowded yet orderly desk, her sewing, the lamps, and the airtight stove. But before he would sit there, he moved everything back to exactly

its own position again and asked her kindly to make no more changes.

"But, Clyde, *dear!* I always feel as if I had a new room when things are all shifted about!"

"Please, Rose, as a special favour to me?"

She conceded it gracefully. And Clyde in turn was gracious and kind, chatting with her about affairs at the office, interested in her progress in French, and with a plan for the next holiday. He could be interesting, and he had moods of being extremely fond of her, commenting upon her pretty hair, her good sense, her superiority to other women. They read the Gates Mill *Republican* and discussed it, and delicious food pleased him; he liked her to go out and cook dinner on Thursday nights when Minnie was away.

But sometimes she wondered why they had done it.

A pleasanter phase of the new state of affairs was her own improved position in Gates Mill. The little town of five thousand persons was Rose Bainbridge's whole world, and it was gratifying to find herself, at a bound, an important personage therein.

She liked, for one thing, occasionally to drive to the Iron Works and pick Clyde up, to bring him home in the late afternoon. He had taught her to run the car comfortably, and once or twice a week she had it for the day. Or perhaps he would drive it away as usual in the mornings, and turn up unexpectedly for lunch, offering Rose the car for the afternoon.

Rose loved to call for her mother, and perhaps crippled Ellie Kane, and drive them out between the flat bare fields that even in February were showing the blue green of the young alfalfa, and were filmed in the marshy places with the coming emerald of willows

and reeds. The shadows were lengthening, and the days were lengthening, and now and then they found a trillium up under the oaks, or heard the thrilling sweet liquid note of an early lark.

She was a little nervous about the car, so many things might come up to delay her, and she had never failed Clyde and did not want to try the experiment! So she would take her guests home early, appreciative and affectionate, and drive slowly along River Street, and out to the big, grimy, sooty Iron Works.

It was pleasant to go in and get respectful and kindly glances on all sides; pleasant to approach Clyde's guarded door and hear Simms's "You can go right in, Mrs. Bainbridge," and pleasant to catch Clyde's grave, approving smile over his work, and sit quietly and shyly smiling at Lizzie Weeds while she awaited him.

Clyde had the offices of the old founder of the business, and Jack Talbot's office was now where Clyde's had once been, round the corner and up a flight of outdoor stairs; Rose rarely saw him in these days. Clyde gave her the impression that young Talbot was an ass about the business, and the two men, she well knew, were utterly uncongenial. Rose never mentioned him.

She would look interestedly at the freight cars loaded with the neatly boxed "Centipede," and at the fifty or sixty employees who filed out of the gates before Clyde Bainbridge, who was vice-president, was through with his work.

"It must make an impression on them, Clyde," she said more than once, "to see you slaving here! Old Mr. Talbot used to go home every day at about four."

"I should think it would," he would always answer, pleased.

But he would never give Lizzie Weeds or any one else a lift home if she somewhat timidly suggested it. This really hurt Rose one night, when her magnificent old grandfather was to be seen wandering contentedly along among sooty pools and rusting wet scrap iron, and when she eagerly called her husband's attention to him.

Clyde turned a corner, swung on to the bridge.

"What do you say? I didn't hear you."

"Ah, it was Grandpa, Clyde! He was walking along there and he saw us."

He was still driving along briskly, in a thin stream of home-going cars from the Iron Works and the flour mill beyond them.

Rose was distressedly silent.

"I can't very well turn in this line," Clyde said, presently in an unencouraging tone. "I'm extremely tired to-night."

"Oh, that's all right; he won't mind!" she said, generously.

"Thank you, dear," Clyde said, appreciatively, as he drove on.

With a swiftness only possible to her pliable sweet youth, she changed. She grew more silent, somewhat constrained, unsure of herself. By total and complete self-surrender, self-abnegation, she could make him happy for perhaps seven eighths of the time.

Rose herself had no idea of what it cost her. She did not even know that she was nervous, anxious, apprehensive a greater part of the time about trifles that should never have concerned her at all. She only knew that for reasons impossible to recall, she and Clyde Bainbridge had rather suddenly, yet quite deliberately, married each other, and that she had no choice but to

make him as good a wife as was possible, and herself a successful and contented woman, if that might be.

The young Rogerses and the old Rogerses, the Raymonds, the Terrys and Barkers, Doctor and Mrs. Newman and the Pottles all gave the Bainbridges dinner parties, and they were asked to join the "Old Timers Five Hundred Club." And Rosalind found all this unbelievably exciting and bewilderingly gratifying. She had the right gowns, and she had a handsome husband who was immensely respected by all these respectable persons.

Rosalind was conscientiously studying bridge, but meanwhile she played five hundred with the younger element, while Clyde plunged eagerly into hard rubbers with the elder Mrs. Talbot, Jack's mother, and perhaps Judge Raymond, or Edith's father, old Fred Rogers, of the Bank, or Mrs. Barker, who were all expert players. Young Mrs. Talbot was eager to rank in this group, and played a great deal, and Jack played fairly well.

The first of these formal entertainments was in October, when Rose had been married about six weeks. The evening was suffocatingly hot, and she wore a very simple organdy gown decorated only by knowing little scallops of the material itself, and the thin silk stockings and slippers that matched its elusive peach colour. Excitement gave her a brilliant colour, and as she came into the Pearsalls' big sitting room, where half-a-dozen other guests were already assembled, her beauty was so startlingly evident that several of the women later agreed that it was easy to see why any man should marry her.

She had told Clyde that she was a little nervous, and

he kindly remained beside her, as the others, in their lemon satins and flower-decorated gowns, gathered about her. Rose had an impression of white woodwork and a great many colours; she had wondered a thousand times what the inside of the Pearsall house looked like, and found it cluttered and disappointing. Card tables with new packs were set out, and there were prizes wrapped in tissue-paper on the mantel. Elsie Hellman had been engaged as an extra waitress, and presently announced dinner.

Jack and Edith were not at this affair, but a week later they gave a dinner on their own account. This was a wet, wild autumn evening, and branches were swishing and creaking in the old garden as Clyde raced his laughing wife from the motor car to the lighted porch.

"You got wet, I'm afraid?" Edith said, hospitably, from the drawing-room doorway, after the maid had sent Rose upstairs to leave her wraps upon Edith's beautifully draped twin bed, and Rose had come somewhat uncomfortably and shyly down again.

"Oh, not a bit!" The damp weather had curled her hair, her cheeks glowed splendidly, her blue eyes shone like stars. "Hello, Jack," she said quietly to her host, giving him her hand as he left the group by the fire and came out to greet her.

"Hel—*lo!*" Jack exclaimed, delightedly and loudly. "A great deal is said about the weather, but I notice nothing is done! Hello, Clyde, how's everything? Say, isn't this fearful?—Awfully glad to have you people under our roof at last! Rose, you know the Fred Rogerses, and my mother——? Mother, this is Mrs. Bainbridge."

"I don't call anybody who looks like a little girl of ten *Mrs.* Anything!" Jack's mother said, whimsically, "I'm going to call you Rose!"

"Oh, I wish you *would!*" Rose said, fervently and smilingly. "Clyde, you know Mrs. Terry? How is the darling little grandson, Mrs. Terry? I remember Mr. Terry bringing his picture to the office—he was taken on his kiddy-car——"

"My dear, she's going to have another!" Mrs. Terry said, intimately. "Well, I don't care—we're all married folks!" she defended herself a little apologetically, as there was a general laugh and a gasp of protest. Rose felt herself included, excited, happy.

"All right, 'Gusta," the older Mrs. Talbot said.

"Just a minute, Mother Talbot!" Edith interrupted, prettily. "We'll wait for Mr. Fred, 'Gusta."

"Oh, I do beg your pardon, Edith, I thought we were all here," said her husband's mother. Edith gave her a flicker of a smile, gave Jack a slow, significant look, and said coolly:

"Oh, that's all right!"

"You're next to me, Rose, and the other animals follow us into the ark," Jack said. Rose wondered why he seemed so nervous and was so talkative—so almost silly. She had never seen him in his own group before. She longed for some sort of quiet word—he had never been like this.

He looked rather badly, she thought, his colour not wholesome, and his eyes weary and restless. He chattered too much, perhaps that was the duty of the host.

Well, here she was seated at the Talbot table, where she had so often longed to be. The frail gown of black lace was exquisitely becoming, she knew she had never looked

better in her life. All the men were astonishingly kind to her, and the women, too. The latter came as a surprising discovery; instinctively she had always feared the women.

But her friendliness, her youth, and sweetness and strangeness, made an instant appeal to them all. Hers was a fresh voice among their too-familiar voices; she made them laugh, she was really interested in their views, really anxious to win them, and one after another they succumbed.

After dinner she found herself at a hilarious card table with Bozzy Terry, Juliet Barker, and Jack. But Jack kept jumping up to arrange lights, sharpen pencils, close or open windows, answer the telephone, and attend to other matters touching the comfort of his guests, and when at last he sat down to deal the first hand Edith called him and whispered smilingly to him from where she was sitting playing bridge with Clyde and some older persons.

Immediately he came back, bringing young Mrs. Newman, who had just come downstairs after telephoning home about her baby, and it appeared that she was to play and that Jack would later "cut in."

He went off to the fireplace to talk to one or two extra men who were lounging and smoking there, and presently one of the men, Edith's Uncle Joe Cole, came over and played at Rose's table and then the other man, a newcomer from the East named Thorpe.

The five hundred game became extremely merry; Rose moved her shining eyes reproachfully to her partner.

"Oh, but what a frightfully rash bid! Shouldn't you have had the joker to bid that way?"

Bozzy Terry had laughed joyously, shamelessly, and had pleaded with her with tears of mirth in his eyes.

"Oh, please don't ask me what I *should* have had, Mrs. Bainbridge, or you'll make me feel like a dog!"

Truman Thorpe looked at this small-town bride critically for the tenth time. Who was she? he had been asking the men. Did Gates Mill realize how beautiful she was?

"Well, now you've got a very different sort of partner, Mrs. Bainbridge," he assured her. "You and I'll wipe this smart young man off the map!"

"Go ahead!" said Juliet, watching now. And go ahead they did, so effectually that Rose presently carried home the first prize, a pair of little Canton candlesticks.

"Thank you so much for coming!" said Edith, in the doorway, at quarter to one o'clock. She had just been cross with Jack over the last hand at bridge, and had lost twenty-one dollars to Clyde. Rosalind felt oddly baffled and blank, her first dinner party in the Talbot house had proved to be rather flat and wearying.

"That girl hates me!" Clyde said, amusedly, driving home.

"Who? Edith?"

"Edith. The old lady—his mother—hates me, too. But the girl would put a knife into me!" Clyde added.

"Oh, Clyde, but why do you say that?"

"Well, my place in the business annoys her and frets her. Jack practically takes my orders—and they like to think that it's the Talbots first, and everyone else in town afterward, you know! And then her father is getting properly respectful, and she resents that."

"I thought Jack was really concentrating and grasping some of the business at last?"

"Well, he is, in a way. Paul Long was saying so, anyway. But his wife and mother resent that he ever had to let any of the authority slip. Have a good time to-night?"

"Those men were nice to me—everyone was, in fact. Yes, I had a nice time—I guess."

"Never saw you look better!" Clyde said, and Rosalind was dependent enough already upon his opinion to be made happy by the little compliment.

So the months went by, with a good deal of bewildered silence and readjustment on her part, but no resentment at the change that marriage had brought into her life and mind, into her very soul, and very rarely anything that even approached analysis or appreciation of it. Rose was sometimes lonely, in the long wet months, but the spring came early, and a rather frightening touch of bronchial trouble on her mother's part gave her an excuse for long days in the old home, enjoying once more Cecy's counsel and company, and the affection and companionship of her old grandfather, Ned, Audrey, and even the two dressmakers who shared their meals.

CHAPTER XIX

THEN came a change. It was in late March that Clyde began to advise his mother-in-law to sell the old house that had been the Tallifer mansion, and one of the village boasts, fifty years ago. Cecy and Rose were shocked to hear him call it a "shell," a "wreck," an "old barn." It had always seemed elegant and admirable to them, even in decay.

Clyde's idea was that with the three or four thousand clear that the sale would bring, Rose's mother and the younger children should move out to one of the new, clean, practical cottages being built at Union Junction beyond Terry's Mills, three miles out of town. Ned and Cecy could finish their schooling there, and eventually find themselves ready for employment either in the Mills, or in the large and flourishing county seat of Alta Loma, three miles farther away. Alta Loma was a town of twelve thousand inhabitants, and held in great respect by Gates Mill.

Cecy and Ned were youthfully enthusiastic about this plan, and Grandpa and Audrey as eager as children for the change. To Rose's surprise her mother was also willing to consider it.

River Street and the encroaching backs of office buildings and apartments had long been a trial, it appeared, to Mrs. Kirby, and boarding Mrs. Connor and her sister was becoming a good deal of a burden. Clyde drove her out one day to see the "Homestead

Bungalows" at the junction, and she was delighted with the young trees, standing like carriage whips along the muddy roads, and the bright enamelled sinks, and the hardwood floors. A sitting room, three bedrooms, a charming bare little dining room flooded with sunshine through paint and plaster-flecked windows, and splendid closets, splendid storage room everywhere. There was even a small garage, with a pooled drive already cut in the raw meadow grass upon which it stood.

Cecy chattered about the French glass door between the dining room and drawing room. Ned began to estimate the purchase of a flivver, having in mind one downtown with "$165" shamelessly chalked upon its windshield. Mrs. Kirby said with a great sigh that it would certainly be wonderful not to have to run up and down stairs three hundred times a day. Audrey kept saying, "I'd go to the Linkum School, wouldn't I, Mom? Would I, Mom? Mom, wouldn't I go to the Linkum School? Ned, ask Mom if I would go to the Linkum?"

"Would you have a gas stove or a coal stove, Mr. Bainbridge?" asked his mother-in-law, wandering back and forth abstractedly through the empty, sun-flooded spaces. "Lovely white woodwork," she commented. "I think I got my heavy cold in that cold upstairs at home. This door goes into—oh, just back into the hall again."

"I'd have both," Clyde answered, after consideration. "If you decide upon a gas stove, let me buy it in San Francisco for you. We get wholesale prices, you know."

"The one Mom wanted at Bender's was forty-two dollars," Cecy contributed, interestedly.

"That would cost you—let's see, a little less than twenty-three dollars!" Clyde told her.

"I won't have you out of pocket for it, mind," Mrs. Kirby said, excited and eager. "You do *enough*."

"Oh, no, I assure you it is our regular discount!" he told her, and Rose thought it was lovely of Clyde to putter round here with Mom so concernedly, and not to take the credit for his generosity about at least ordering the stove, at least having thought of offering to order it.

She alone was dubious, a little silent, a little sad, about these new plans. The old house had happy associations for her; it was her native atmosphere, with River Street humming only a half-block away, and all the familiar neighbourhood interests progressing like an ever-new novel about her.

"You'll be so far away from me, Mom!"

"Not with the trolley going to town every twenty minutes, dear," Mrs. Kirby said. And Clyde made her heart stand still with one of his disapproving looks.

It was decided that if not less than a certain sum was offered for the old house, Mrs. Kirby would sell, and this sum and a trifle more was immediately offered by a building firm, which proposed to put six five-room apartments on the site, and call them the "Tallifer Arms." And in mid-April the move was made, and labourers began ruthlessly to tear down the walls and floors of the old house, exposing its shabby papers and worn woodwork shamelessly, and after that the short length of old Mill Lane was so altered that Rose never cared to go there or felt any especial emotion of memory when she did.

She felt lonely and strange, coming down to River Street in the warming spring mornings, in her trim

tailor-made with the immaculate frill. Only a year ago she had been getting ready for "Golden West Week," but Clyde did not want her to be Columbia this year. He said that it was a little undignified in a bride—she didn't see Edith Talbot or Amy Rogers getting themselves up on top of floats——

Her quick colour and a rush of inward resentment utterly disagreed with him; she made no protest. But in her honest, unspoiled heart she knew that he was wrong, that this simple friendly sharing of the community's pleasure belonged to a more generous code than he would ever know.

Two years ago she and Jack Talbot had been sweethearts. Rosalind never thought of Jack as being even a friend of hers now. Life had carried them away from each other; Edith had come home from school, and he had been unkind to Rosalind, and she had said that she hated him. But she did not feel that she hated him now; she merely felt a little surprise, sometimes, that it should all have come out as it had, and sometimes she wondered if all marriages were like her own, and if all women suffered the same bewildering metamorphosis during the first few months of married life.

She had dreamed only a few short months ago of some triumphant step by which she should crush Jack Talbot, force him to see what beauty and youth and devotion he had thrown away.

But since her marriage, her own problem had too painfully and too completely absorbed her. What Jack Talbot felt had come to seem of no importance; she must fight for her own happiness now, and yet keep Clyde and Mom and the family happy, too. It was pleasant, truly, to be asked to join the Woman's Club,

to go to the Christmas meeting as young Mrs. Rogers's guest, it was gratifying to say "charge to Mrs. Clyde Bainbridge, please," in Bond's, and to drive about in the car.

All these obvious and tangible things, however, were but the guinea's stamp. In marriage one had to dig below the stamp to see if there were gold there indeed. And Rose had not been married six months before she realized, as hundreds of women realize every day, that she must find her self-expression in life, her contentment, and her satisfaction, against rather than with any coöperation or sympathy from her husband.

Their natures were utterly and exactly opposed. Where she was gay, casual, and friendly, he was rigid and formal; to the formal and ostentatious display that he liked every fibre of her simplicity objected. Small mishaps and inconveniences and events made her laugh joyously and filled him with anger and resentment.

A late meal, an unexpected delay, or the friendly approach and greeting of some indifferent person in River Street merely interested Rose. Her tears, her concern, were for suffering Russian babies, for boys sent to prison in their teens, or perhaps for Mom, with a hateful burn on her finger. Clyde took no interest in anything that did not touch the narrow groove in which he lived and moved.

If it concerned the office, the Talbots, his own house or car, his dignity, his reputation, he was instantly in arms.

"What makes you think you have to go and see your mother?" he would ask.

"I'm going on the trolley, Clyde. Too muddy for the car!"

"I didn't ask how you were going."

"Oh! Well, of course I don't have to go to see her. It's just that I really want to."

"You *think* you want to!"

Silence.

"You have simply deceived yourself into thinking that you ought to see her every day or two, and consequently you make a slave of yourself doing it!"

"No, dear, it's not entirely that. I really—I feel better if I see Mom nearly every day!"

"I thought this was the day of Amy Terry's bridge party?"

"It is. I'm going in later; I'm coming home on the four-twenty car. But I can't play bridge with those sharks, you know!"

"Terry and I are associated in business, so I presume that is reason enough for you to be casual with his wife!"

Silence again.

"Could you pick me up at the Terrys' at about half-past five, Clyde?"

"Not to-night. Telephone for a taxi."

"Oh, no—no! Mrs. Newman will bring me home, she goes right past our lane."

Silence. Silence. Sometimes there seemed to Rose to be safety only in silence.

CHAPTER XX

In the second week of June there was a small and select picnic at Kirby's Dam. All the world would go later on "Gates Mill Day," the town's birthday. This affair was for families whose sensibilities would be offended by the public event and yet who wished to enjoy some of the early summer beauty of the groves about the dam. Only the members of the "Old Timers" Card Club were expected to participate, taking about six motor cars, with all the handsomely fitted little picnic boxes filled with salads and thermos bottles for the lunch.

Rose had found herself unaccountably depressed of late, nervous and sensitive, and with impaired appetite and broken sleep. Perhaps actuated by an undefined desire to share with the little sister the worldly goods that had cost her so dear, she had half-wanted Cecy to come on this picnic. But somewhat to her relief, after she had argued and pleaded the matter with Clyde and it had been agreed that Cecy should be asked but not urged to come, Cecy declined.

"It'd be different if Dory Barker was home," Cecy said, over the telephone. "But he doesn't get home until the twenty-sixth! And it's my geometry exam, and I don't dare skip it!"

So the Bainbridges drove to the scene of the festivities alone, in their clean little car, with a neat box of cold food stored behind them. Clyde had been especially

nice this morning, helping Rose make sandwiches, and enthusiastic over Minnie's chocolate cake.

The weather was unfavourable; it was a brooding, silent day, with heavy gray clouds overhead. There had been much telephoning in the Upper River Street neighbourhood, just after breakfast, as to whether it was wise to go on with the picnic plans. But at ten the sun had shone upon wet, tossing leaves for a few deceptive minutes, and it was agreed that the day was certainly going to be clear.

As Rose and Clyde drove along to the quiet jingle-jingle of tire chains, the trees, richly dressed in new bright green foliage, were whipping about in heavy, erratic winds, and little currents were blown into the coffee-brown surface of the wayside pools. Buttercups in the fields bowed their heads as to a reaper, and when the sun shone fitfully, colours everywhere, on orchards, forests, and vineyards, were spectacularly bright, and majestic cloud-shadows drove across the clear purple-blue of the great mountains.

There was something wild, inspiring, almost fearful about the warm, wet summer morning, and Rose observed that she liked sometimes to spend such a day out-of-doors.

"Give me sunshine for a picnic!" Clyde answered.

"Well, yes, I think so, too."

"That hot coffee of Minnie's is going to taste *good*."

"Oh, don't mention it! I'm famished already."

They were not the first at the Dam, and immediately entered upon the chorus of lamentations and laughing complaints, and into the group that was spreading a long table where the sun would find them, if it came

out, and where overhanging branches could not sweep them with cold washes of water.

"Those are your walnut cookies, Amy—my gracious, don't they look good!"

"I think that's an awfully good idea, Sally—wrapping them up in packages that way, one ham and one lettuce and one olive."

"Well, it does seem to save fuss!"

"Is that one of Minnie Carter's chocolate cakes? Do you know, I almost telephoned you, Mrs. Bainbridge, to beg you to have her make us one—and then I was ashamed to be so piggy!"

Cool winds swept the grove, and sometimes steel-dark shadows from clouds overhead put the whole group into semi-darkness for a few chilly minutes. The women wore their coats, and there was much loud appreciation of the smoking coffee when it was finally poured.

"I'm glad we did it—I think this is fun—we don't have to stay late!" they all said, gorging rapidly on the rich, cold food.

But after lunch the sun really did come out, as if it meant to stay, and the whole affair brightened into real noise and gaiety at last. The picnickers sat long about the littered board, the men smoking, the women gossiping and laughing. Personalities were exchanged, and much town speculation revived.

Jack, Rosalind noted, was rather silent and unresponsive, and very quickly and quietly efficient when there was work to be done. She was quiet herself, but for reason.

She listened, smiled, left her food almost untasted. The queer, uncertain day seemed to have found a stormy, sunny, bewildered reflection in her own soul.

She breathed the deep, delicious odour of wet oak woods, she caught a whiff of golden, fragrant wind from off the buttercup fields when the sun shone; she was Rosalind Kirby, picnicking at the Dam with all these friendly persons who were unaware of her very existence a year ago.

After awhile, when the men were trying jumps, throws, shots, physical contests of various sorts, she had a few sentences in an aside with old Mrs. Terry. Rosalind liked this soft, kind woman better than the others.

The grandmother listened alertly.

"Well, I guess you're elected, dear!" she said, with a good motherly look of interest and pleasure.

"I would have asked my own mother," Rosalind confessed, "but when I've seen her the last two times my little sisters have been there——"

"You'd be glad, wouldn't you, Mrs. Bainbridge, if it was so?"

"Glad, yes. But it makes me a little—frightened."

"The pain ain't nothing," said Mrs. Terry, whose youngest child was thirteen.

"Pain?" Rosalind glanced about for possible eavesdroppers. They were alone at the end of the long table. "I haven't thought of that part," she said. "I was just thinking—it seems such a tremendous responsibility——"

"You go right ahead and have your baby; he'll pay his own way!" Mrs. Terry advised her, comfortably, completely misunderstanding her apprehension.

"Thank you!" Rose responded, so simply and sweetly that the older woman from that hour was her admiring friend.

And for the first time that day Rose thought of her

baby as a reality, and of its claim on her, and hers on it. A baby, a real live little creature of flesh and blood—and hers.

Solemnity, reverence, suffused her being. She always would remember this day as the one upon which she gravely, and in a mood of high exultation and reverence, dedicated her life to this creature dearer than herself.

Trembling sunshine upon saturated grass, wet branches moving slowly overhead, the Terrys and Rogerses and Raymonds wandering about the dells and glens of the Dam, and Rosalind Kirby married and going to have a baby. After awhile she walked alone about the Dam to the headwaters, where the creek came in, a creek earth-coloured to-day, and running noisily over pebbles and shingle, and choked with many a branch and sodden leaf.

The wide sheet of water, struck into brilliance by the sun, was below her feet. It looked infinitely calm and peaceful in the light of the stormy spring afternoon, and Rose found herself wondering what she had ever had to worry about before she was married, what it would be like to feel silly, light-hearted, free again.

A wriggling yellow-bellied water-dog slipped from a log, and drifted rather than swam through the muddy depths. A cool wind swished reed and branches with the long sound of falling waves, and the sun went under a heavy cloud.

"Hello!" said Jack Talbot, suddenly beside her. "What are you thinking about, Rose? You look terribly serious."

"I can't remember," she said, smiling.

"Don't you think it's keen, up here at the Dam?"

"I was just thinking"—they were standing, staring down at it now, side by side—"I was just thinking how peaceful and wonderful it is!" Rose agreed, thoughtfully, turning upon him the grave blue of her beautiful blue eyes. She dropped them again to the water, and he noted the rich sooty curve of their lashes against the velvet of her cheek. "I'd like to come up here a whole day, alone," she said.

Jack did not answer, but as they turned to make their way slowly down the wide, irregular path that encircled the water, he said suddenly:

"You must miss your mother and Cecy terribly, don't you?"

It was the first word of sympathy she had had. Rose paused again, looked down at the water, and was surprised to feel her eyes stinging and her throat thickening as she glanced up at him again.

"You poor kid!" Jack said, affectionately.

"It all seems—so different——" she said, smiling gravely, but with some little difficulty, and watering eyes.

"And you were all so crazy about each other!" Jack remembered.

"Ah, *weren't* we?"

Suddenly the big man standing there beside her seemed to change his identity, or perhaps assume his own after a change, and become Jack Talbot again, the man against whose rough tweed coat her cheek had so often rested, the man whose kindness, whose friendliness, whose moods of gaiety, of passionate admiration for herself, of boyish ambition and fitful conscientiousness had once made all her world. Rose felt herself trembling a little in the realization that he had come back in this

hour of vague fears and loneliness, this strange hour when she felt herself embarking upon such new and frightening waters.

He had been a stranger to her for almost two years. But now they were suddenly friends again, liking the sound of each other's voices, picking up all the interest and sympathy that had united them as closely as ever had young passion two years ago.

They were married now, each had his own problem; Rose's life indeed seemed all problems. But the shadow that had been Jack Talbot had turned into the living, kindly, valued friend again.

If she felt this, without quite sensing what she felt, Jack's emotions were of a slightly more definite type. He saw beside him on the shores of the Dam this slender, exquisitely beautiful woman, into whose mind and soul he could well read a beauty and a goodness that eclipsed that of her face. She seemed a little grave and dignified in these days, and was thus made only the more wonderful, more utterly different from everybody else.

He heard all his circle acclaiming her beauty at first sight, and beginning now to praise her voice, her manner, her ready sweet interest in anybody and anything. When she turned her attention to him, soberly and kindly, when she said "Jack" casually, in greeting or parting, he knew that he might remember when that attention was always radiantly and fully his for the asking, and when that "Jack" was followed by the laughing and eager "darling!" that brought her, fragrant and young and deliciously yielding, into his arms.

He did not remember these things out of loyalty to Edith, who absorbed every particle of his time, his devotion, his fealty, as his wife.

But he could not prevent the sudden bitter ache of loss that went through him as he stood beside Rosalind at the Dam to-day, and noted the little rough stocking, the sensible striped homespun skirt, the big brown coat that enveloped her slim figure, and the bright hair that was blown up against her hat in rings and tendrils of burned gold. So friendly, so womanly, so simple and sympathetic—just asking that the world be happy and kindly and good—and lost to him for ever.

It had begun to rain again, slow, soft, uncertain drops that struck the smooth surface of the Dam into interlocking rings and circles; the air was chill and restless, and they went in silence back to the cars, and separated for the drive home.

CHAPTER XXI

Clyde and Rosalind had some serious talk as they drove slowly along in the rain to the jingling of the tire chains. The rain had ended the picnic at three o'clock, and Clyde had decided to go back to the office for a few hours' hard work. Rosalind really dreaded the return to her dark, silent, tree-shrouded house, and asked him to drop her at Miss Cartier's for a French lesson.

"Don't forget it's Minnie's night off and you have to get dinner started," he reminded her.

"She's going Saturday night, you know."

"Oh, of course. Don't let her get in the habit of changing it about though, will you, Rose?"

"I asked you, Clyde." She realized suddenly that she was tired. "You remember I said that since we weren't doing anything on Saturday night——"

"I didn't say that you didn't ask me!" he interrupted, quickly, always unable to bear the suggestion that he had been to blame. "I am simply suggesting that you don't spoil the girl, that's all."

"Very well, Clyde." Rose wondered if such violently suppressed feelings as she sometimes experienced might have a bad effect upon a baby. She must be careful now to see that her baby had every chance.

She had half-decided to tell Clyde this afternoon that there might be a baby. But somehow she felt chilled and weary now, and unwilling to open the subject.

They rolled along carefully between the quiet farms smitten silent and lifeless under the quiet, sunless afternoon. Rose thought of the big barns full of sweet dry hay, where children were playing, and wondered how many of the wives were unhappy—with a farm, and children, and kittens, and chickens, one might be very happy married almost to any one.

And she was not unhappy. She was not unhappy. There was a great deal that was fine about Clyde; he was a good husband. Only life was a little difficult sometimes——

"Do you know what I mean when I speak of the 'Centipede'?" he asked her, suddenly.

To this question from almost anybody else in the world Rose would have returned a burst of laughter and a scornful "What do you think I am? A half-wit? Do you suppose that there's a person in Gates Mill who doesn't know all about the Talbot 'Centipede'?"

But no one addressed Clyde in this fashion, not even his wife.

"The farm tractor? Of course!" she said.

Clyde was silent, and again Rose looked at the farms, and the little farm gardens with fuchsias and lilacs and young trees in them.

An hour ago the rain had stopped, now the west was clear, and the clouds were moving away in great masses toward the south. Sinking sunshine fell in long shafts across the world, and through the wet trees, and the pools were full of red light. Two horses galloped down a field, flinging up great sods with their hoofs as they came, and a slender woman came out of a kitchen doorway and walked across a side yard, kissing the fat cheek of a baby she held high against her face as she went.

"Do you remember telling me a year ago that you hoped life would give you a chance to square accounts with Jack Talbot?" Clyde asked, abruptly.

She did not think of Jack or Edith or all the others who had been unkind to her then. But Rose thought instantly of her child, and that he must be protected from anything like hate.

"I forgive him," she said, briefly, even while the thought shot across her consciousness that it was for a far greater alteration in her destiny than either he or she had dreamed then. "I suppose a man might feel in conscience bound not to marry a woman for whom he had ceased to care," she added, slowly.

"You didn't talk that way a year ago!" Clyde said, almost with disapproval.

"No," she said. And she seemed almost tangibly to hold close to her heart the small, sleepy, wrappered form of a baby, as she did so. A boy, with fair hair and blue eyes—ah, what company he would be! How he would fill his mother's life!

"Suppose I told you," Clyde was saying, measuredly, "that you may have it in your power one of these days —*we* may have it in our power—to put the Talbot family, once and for all, under an enormous obligation?"

Sheer surprise roused her from her dream, and she looked at him in bewilderment.

"You mean through the business?"

"Through the 'Centipede.'"

"Clyde, are things going badly at the Iron Works?"

"On the contrary."

"Well, but how, then?" Rosalind demanded, after a pause in which she had twisted about on the seat to stare into his face.

"You remember old Talbot's death, almost two years ago?" Clyde began. "I don't know whether you knew it or not, but he sent for me when he knew he was dying."

"I think I remember that."

"Has it ever occurred to you, Rose, to think where old Talbot got the design for the 'Centipede'?" Clyde asked, significantly.

"The design? No."

"The design is of course the whole thing," Clyde told her.

"I suppose so. But—but what do you mean, Clyde? I don't understand you. What about it?"

"Did you ever know that your grandfather made that design?" Clyde asked, with the same oddly deliberate manner.

"My—you don't mean Grandpa?"

"Certainly. He was a mechanical engineer, and a genius at his profession, as far as I can make out!"

"Grandpa!" Rose said, proudly. "The old darling! Imagine his being so smart!"

"He had an office down in River Street."

"Oh, I know all about that office! And he designed the 'Centipede'? Does Mom know that?—Of course she doesn't! And did he sell this design to Mr. Talbot?"

"No, that was what old Talbot told me on his deathbed. He entered into partnership with Talbot—*entered into partnership*."

"The darling!" Rose mused, fondly. "He would probably have been a rich man if it hadn't been for that horrible accident!"

"Exactly. He supplied the design for the 'Centipede,' and old Talbot had just put five or six hundred

dollars into a small foundry—the beginning of the Iron Works."

"Five or six hundred thousand, you mean, don't you?"

"Five or six hundred. This was forty years ago, Rose, when Gates Mill was just a sort of overnight stop on the way to the mines."

"You don't mean that the Talbot fortune was built on five or six hundred dollars!"

"That's all it was. Your grandfather didn't put any money in, it seems; but the 'Centipede' is *his* invention."

"Did he patent it?"

"He designed it, and Talbot began to experiment in manufacturing it, and they drew up a rough agreement that your grandfather was to have a share in the business."

"Grandpa was!" Clyde was surprised that she showed no more excitement. But after all, Rose had been hearing similar stories of her own people all her life. "I wish he had it now!" she said, wistfully.

"Why do you say that?" her husband asked, watching her.

"Well, for several reasons, Clyde. It isn't only the money. But I would feel so much safer about Cecy if she could be sent to that Berkeley school where Dorothy Rogers goes, or to the Sisters in San Rafael. And it would be so delicious to have Mom have a good servant —she isn't so young as she was. And then there's Ned, to say nothing of how proud Grandpa would be to have one of his boasts come true—darling old Grandpa, who has always been talking about his papers and the fire! And then it *would* be a satisfaction, Clyde,"

Rosalind confessed, honestly, "to have Edith—and Mrs. Talbot, and some of the others—realize that it was only chance that made them so rich and all the rest of us so poor! You know they talk as if they had their money and position by divine right——"

"You can do all that, perhaps," he told her, clearly, as she paused.

"Clyde Bainbridge!" Rosalind stammered, astounded.

"You can do all that, and more, too, if you can somehow manage to find that old contract, Rose," her husband said.

"The old contract! But wasn't it outgrown, or outlawed, or whatever it is, years ago? Grandpa must have sold it, or cancelled it, or something!"

"It was signed a week before the fire, Rose, and only two before the accident."

"No, but the accident came first, Clyde, and it was while Grandpa was up at Hendersons, when they were trying to cure him, that the fire happened!"

"Are you sure of that?"

"Oh, positive! I've heard Mom talk about it a thousand times."

"Does it strike you as odd, Rose, that there should have been a fire, just there, just then?"

Light dawned in her bewildered eyes.

"But—but that makes old Mr. Talbot—that makes Jack's father——"

"A common thief—certainly!" Clyde said.

"You don't mean that he took advantage of Grandpa's being unable to remember anything——?"

"That's exactly what he did!"

"And never paid Grandpa a cent of his percentage on

the 'Centipede'?" Colour flamed in her cheeks. "He *did* pay Grandpa's doctor and hospital bills, but Mom always thought that it was because they were driving behind old Mr. Talbot's stallion when they had the runaway!" she said, dazedly. "Clyde, you can't be sure of this," she began again, almost pleadingly.

"Talbot told me so, himself!"

"But he was ill—he must have been raving. Why should he tell you?"

"Because he was afraid that that old contract might turn up, Rose, and Jack have to pay the piper! He told me that if it did, not to fight, to buy them off, at their own price——"

"Them?"

"Well, you. You Kirbys. It amounts to that. That percentage would be yours if we could find the old paper."

Rose's blue eyes fairly flamed.

"But, Clyde, to be comfortably rich! To have Mom living up in Harrison Street, to have her able to travel with Cecy!" Her voice dropped. "But wasn't it—it was probably burned!" she said, hopelessly.

"Talbot feared not. He said your grandfather's offices were gutted by the fire——"

"He hadn't anything to do with the fire?"

"He didn't admit it. His story was this: that he had put a little money into the Works, and your grandfather a little brain. Nobody could dream that the 'Centipede' would catch on as it did, or even that California was going to be a state of small farms. I suppose five hundred dollars would have bought your grandfather's rights any time in the first five years. Talbot had hard times, they nearly went under in '93; it was only about

twenty or twenty-five years ago that they began to make money. He said that he always intended, if your grandfather continued insane——"

"I couldn't believe this, Clyde, if he hadn't told you himself!"

"Well, it knocked me cold, I can tell you. He destroyed his copy of the contract, of course, and the witnesses died years and years ago. There is absolutely nobody who knows about it; he said that sometimes he felt perfectly safe, and at others he was simply in a panic of fear. He was *confident* your grandfather's copy of the contract was burned, if it was in your grandfather's office at the time of the fire. And he said that only about a year ago your grandfather walked out to his office and for about five minutes talked as rationally as a sane man could about it, asking if the business was on a firm footing yet, and saying in so many words that he had mislaid the old agreement, but that he would presently bring it in and read it over. That scared old Talbot, and when he had his stroke he sent for me."

"Jack doesn't know anything about it?"

"Nobody knows anything about it! Old Talbot said that he kept meaning to send for your father, and then, when he died, for you. You were left absolutely in control of everything, weren't you?"

"Yes, but it didn't amount to anything. Mom had all her interest put into my hands; she hates business. She has this new house in Cecy's name, you know. But Grandpa, before ever she was married, made a will leaving everything he had to her, and she passed it on to me."

"Well, then, you've only to find that paper, Rose, to

have the——" Clyde had been about to finish, "the Talbots exactly where you want them!" But a glance at her thoughtful face, a little pale and weary to-day, and with a new earnestness in the blue eyes, arrested him. "To be able to do anything you want to for your mother and the girls!" he finished, shrewdly.

"But Grandpa hasn't a shred of paper that we haven't all been over a thousand times!"

"Hasn't, eh?" he asked, as if disappointed.

"No, you know the more useless a thing is, the more he hoards it! You couldn't just go to Jack?"

"Without a scrap of evidence? He wouldn't believe me, and I couldn't blame him!"

"But some day Grandpa may talk rationally again?"

"What he says would have no weight whatever. Even admitting that there had been this contract, what would prove that he had not sold it, or cancelled it, or destroyed it?"

"Clyde——" Her thoughts were wandering again. "How much money would it mean?"

"Ah, that we would have to work out!"

"Well, if it was ten per cent. Would that mean thousands?"

"Oh, yes, probably."

"But who patented it?" she asked, suddenly, after an interval in which her eyes shone with what he well knew was anticipatory generosity toward the mother and sisters she so loved.

"Talbot did. Unless we had evidence Jack could make that point. But he did not patent it until two months after your grandfather's accident!"

"Clyde," she said, dreamily, "it's like a story. I wonder if it could be among any of those old books Mom

stored downtown when they moved?" she asked. "There were two or three hundred of them."

"No, your grandfather and Ned and I shook and opened every one."

"You did?" she asked, amazed.

"Yes, the day before the move. Your grandfather was talking about his old documents, and we ransacked everything. And I told the men who tore the house down to bring me anything of that sort that they found."

"One might have found it and taken it to Jack?"

"Might."

They had stopped the car now, at the corner of Miss Cartier's humble little street; it was quarter past four by the old clock over the Town Hall. Rose was staring into space, a faint half-frown between the clean-cut arches of her brows.

"Clyde," she began, her heart starting a harder beat, "this has been such a queer day to me. I've been thinking of something all day, and you have. What you've told me seems to have changed everything! And now I want to tell you what my little bit of news is——"

He looked at his wrist.

"Well—make it some other time, Rose. I've *got* to get to the office!"

She roused, glanced at him quickly, and immediately got out of the car, giving him only a rather strained nod and smile in good-bye as he turned away. A chill, a deep fatigue and discouragement seemed to come over her.

She brought her mind resolutely to her lesson; they were reading "La Neuvaine de Colette" now, and Rosa-

lind had pencilled a long list of words for memorizing. But immediately a yellow-haired little girl in a blue romper seemed to be running before her down the path, hoping, not in vain, that her mother would run after her, and pick her up, and kiss her.

And when she entered the musty little over-crowded cottage and greeted the lean, oily-haired elderly woman who rose in pleased surprise to admit her, Rose was smiling.

CHAPTER XXII

Cecilia Kirby, coming in the gate of the Bainbridge house, between the rigidly square hedge of evergreens that were draped with dusty cobwebs in the hot summer shade, and walking about the curved, grimly clean brick paths that were edged with inverted stout bottles, and bordered with great woody masses of pampas grass and thick, stocky shrubs that shut off all vistas, was disgusted to discover herself experiencing the usual strange sinking of the heart.

She always felt it when she came to Rose's house, be her mood, the weather, the circumstances what they might. There was something chilling, repressive, unfriendly about the bay-windowed house on the cliff above the quarry; it was as if it partook of the character of its owner, Cecy sometimes thought. Nothing gay, noisy, human seemed able to exist in its tree-shrouded, lifeless, silent atmosphere.

The girl shrugged, hummed courageously, and snipped a great heavy-headed white rose from a sprawling overgrown bush that threw menacing great dusty feelers across the path. Tangled in the garden growth were sickly young eucalyptus saplings shedding their shabby bark, greedy periwinkle clutching and smothering the more delicate plants with its shining, tenacious leaves, marigolds gone to stalk, and a dozen sorts of rank packed half-wild shrubs that formed an actual jungle on all sides.

Cecilia knew that Santa Clara Street was only a hundred feet away, and beyond that the beauty and humanness of Upper River Street, but she always felt, when she stepped into the green, unwholesome shade of Rose's garden, that the simple, pleasant things of life were put far behind her, that she was in the neighbourhood of frightening and depressing elements.

To-day she mounted the neat wooden steps of the front porch; these and the balustrade were painted stone gray and speckled with black in some long-ago painter's idea of imitation marble. Cecy hated to be so formal as to have to ring at Rose's house, but there was no help for it, and she duly rang.

After awhile a Japanese boy in his shirt-sleeves came to the door, and Cecy was admitted to the cool, orderly, lifeless hall, with oilcloth on the floor, and closed doors on both sides. She followed him straight back past the neat yellow-wood rise of the stairs, and through the dining room, the clean, dusted room at whose windows the battering July sunlight was checked by polished inside wooden shutters. Here the wainscoting was of wood painted yellow, the floor painted and shining, the chairs pushed neatly in against an oblong, light oak table.

The whole house seemed empty, impersonal, dead. Not a spoon, not a thread was out of place. A fly, buzzing in the tempered gloom of the dining room, made a loud sound. The very silence seemed to hum, in the still dry heat of an August afternoon.

"In the garden?" asked Cecy.

The Japanese nodded, and she went out through a square side passage, and followed a familiar path between depressing dragging ropes of willows, and across

a small enclosed place that had once been a cow yard. Beyond was another enclosure and a shed that had housed chickens years ago, but that wore to-day the peculiarly desolate aspect of an abandoned fowl run, with the old whitewash peeling from roosts and nests, and feathers blown into drifts against rusted wire fencing.

The house and garden were placed upon the very edge of the cliff that descended a sharp hundred feet to the rocky gash of the deserted quarry; the drawing-room windows looked, as Cecy knew, straight down the precipitous descent. But the quarry side of the backyard had been safely fenced, and a stretch of grass, apple trees, a table, benches, and Rose's own favourite little ventures in gardening were prettily established within its bounds.

Here Cecy found her sister, and of course the irresistible Mary, this afternoon. Rose was sewing, Mary was toddling about in all the ecstatic dignity of two-and-a-half years in the possession of its first little green tin watering pot. Rose jumped up with a little delighted cry as Cecy appeared, and came over to put one arm about her sister, and give her the loving look that had come to have so much that was maternal in it during the last few years.

Standing so, with Cecy's half-anxious smile fixed upon Rose's face, and their arms locked, and with the friendly baby advancing to display her green watering pot, they made an exquisite picture on the grass under the apple trees, and with the great elms and poplars, that had been planted to grip the earth of the treacherous cliff, forming a lofty roof above their heads.

Rose was twenty-six now; she had been four years a wife. Yet there was something more childish, more

bewildering and questioning than ever in her exquisite blue eyes, and if her manner had gained in a certain definiteness, and there was a new ripeness and wisdom in her quiet voice, there was something so pure, so young, and so fresh in her aspect that she might have been growing younger rather than older during these hard years.

Her glorious burned-gold hair, rippling and waving about her white temples, was swept back simply from her face, and to-day was almost hidden under a broad-brimmed straw hat. Her gown was the simplest sort of thin blue cotton, with a broad transparent collar of stiff organdy from which the clean straight lines of her throat and chin rose as firmly as those of a child.

But for the hundredth time Cecy thought how matchlessly beautiful her sister was. Not only in the clear cream of her skin, and the suggestion of width between the eyes, and the hint of a classic leanness in the modelling of cheek bones and jaw, not only in the dusky thick up-curving lashes and the scarlet of her lovely, firmly governed mouth, but in some spiritual quality that sat strangely upon her youth and beauty. One knew that these eyes had wept, that this mouth had trembled, that this gentle, disciplined woman had prayed, had struggled, and had grown strong.

Cecy herself was charming, warmly gipsylike in colouring, smaller than Rose, full of glow and vivacity and brilliance. At twenty-two she was the most popular girl in Gates Mill, and Rosalind had more than once contrasted her little sister's light-hearted, uncaring joy in love and lovers, in dancing, picnicking, flirting, with her own sad and disillusioning younger years.

"Cecy, you darling!" Rose greeted her, affectionately. "How does this come about?"

"Rose, it's the Terry tea to-day!" her sister reminded her. She caught the baby up, inverted the little red-checked rompers with joyous indignity, kissed Mary's soft little hand and the back of her little neck, and the square little bare leg under the sunburned knee, and suddenly set the child down again, rumpled and breathless and shouting excitedly, on the grass. "Yes, I see it—and it's beautiful. Who buyed the beautiful baby that?" she said, enthusiastically, of the green watering pot.

"I got it for her yesterday in the Five and Ten," Rose explained, "and she absolutely hasn't had it out of her hand since! Don't water Aunt Cecy's shoes, Sweet."

"If—ever—anybody—committed the crime of cannibalism," Cecy began, in measured tones, her eyes upon the checked rompers.

"Well, couldn't you?" Rose said, with the exquisite expression her eyes always had when they looked at Mary. "Do you know that she's your double?" she asked.

Cecy put her head on one side, eyed little Mary thoughtfully, and said with a simple air of modesty that made Rose laugh:

"Rose—I'm not throwing out blossoms at myself—but she *is* like me!"

"Her nature's like yours, too," Rose added. "She's happy-go-lucky, she's friendly—like Dad."

Her eyes filled suddenly, but Cecy paid no attention, and in a few seconds took charge of the conversation by stretching out a brown slim hand and saying abruptly:

"Look, Sis!"

Rose looked at the diamond ring, looked at Cecy, caught the hand in hers, and moved her admiring eyes from Cecy's face to the stone several times.

"My darling!" she said, sympathetically, joyfully. For this was all part of wonderful new plans for Cecilia, whose engagement had been announced only a few weeks ago.

"Happy?" Cecy repeated, for the hundredth time, after half an hour in which Charles Boswell Terry had been the exclusive subject of conversation. "Rose—I'm too happy! There's only one thing in the whole world that I would have different, if I could."

"And what's that, dear? You ought to have nothing but happiness now."

Cecy laid her hand over Rose's as they sat at the garden table, and looked half-daringly, half-timidly into her face.

"If"—Cecy's voice thickened a little, and she smiled through a sudden mist—"If—you were happier, Sis."

The glorious colour flooded Rose's face, and she looked down and moved her fingers slowly back and forth across Cecy's hand.

"My darling, I am not unhappy."

"Ah, but Clyde's so—so cruel to you!" burst out Cecy.

"I don't think that he always—means to be. It's just that strange, cold nature of his, Cecy," Rose said, hesitatingly.

"Oh, Rose, don't defend him! Everyone—everyone *hates* him. Minnie Carter——"

"She was only a servant, Cecy!"

"Well, I don't have to quote any one. I see—everybody sees!—the change in you. I see you so quiet, Sis,

never going anywhere, never having any fun. Why, you're afraid to call your soul your own—you can't move a chair in your own house! You almost never see Mom——"

"Yes, I know," Rose conceded, in a low tone, as the other paused. "But—I have compensations, Sis." And her eyes went to Mary, who had found a knot-hole in the fence, and was enthusiastically watering the quarry far below.

"But, Rose, you're so young and so pretty, dear! And to have everyone—*everyone!*—saying how unsociable he is, and how jealous he is——"

"That, Cecy, isn't everyone's affair," Rose reminded her, quietly, in a silence.

"But listen, Sis, now that I'm going to be married, and am older and all," Cecy began again, suddenly, "if you had it to do over again—only tell me that it wasn't all for Mom's sake, or for us younger ones that you married, Rose——!"

"My dear," Rose answered, smiling, "I *will* talk to you now, because I don't want you to do what I did. I married, Cecy, and I think thousands of women do, largely because there seemed to be no good reason why I shouldn't!"

She stopped and Cecy looked at her expectantly.

"Well, go on——" the younger woman urged.

"That's all, Cecy. That's the whole thing in a nutshell. There was no passion, no force, no irresistible current carrying me to it. It was just a sort of 'Why not?' I don't say this in any disloyalty," Rose added, "but just because it's true. It was as much my fault as his."

"Disloyalty—oh, Rose, how extraordinary you are!"

Cecy said, half-admiring, half-impatient. "Disloyal—*you!* I don't know any other woman in the world who would put up with it. I'd rather a man beat me than treated me with that quiet, cold, impersonal—— I don't know what to call it! Sometimes I think he hates you."

Rose gave her a glance almost fearful.

"Cecy, what makes you think so?" she asked, quickly.

"Well," Cecy answered, in a somewhat modified tone, as if the effect of her words had been more than she intended, "I can't see how he can treat you as he does, hardly listening to you, always doing just the opposite of what you ask, never paying the slightest attention to you or the baby——"

"I don't think he ever loved me, Cecy. That was the fatal thing."

"Oh, nonsense, Rose! He asked you."

"Yes, but—— Cecy, will you promise me never to repeat this? My happiness might depend upon your being discreet here," Rose surprised her sister by saying anxiously. And when Cecy, awed, had given the requisite promise, she went on: "You never knew it, Cecy, but years and years ago Grandpa entered into a contract with old Mr. Talbot—Jack's father—about the 'Centipede.' Did you know that Grandpa invented that?"

"What!" Cecy exclaimed, round-eyed. "And my dear, if he had held on to that piece of prope[illegible] River Street," she was continuing, in the familia[illegible] when Rose interrupted.

"The point is, Cecy, this particular contract [illegible] never cancelled. Clyde believes it to be valid to-d[illegible] Old Talbot told him of it on his death-bed. And [illegible]

think part of Clyde's peculiarity, during these last few years, and his terrific attention to the business, and his bad headaches," Rosalind added, charitably, "come from nothing but his determination to find that paper, if it's in existence! And I think," she finished, unguardedly, "that he expected that either Grandpa or I would perhaps be able to help him—and we haven't been. It's become a sort of disease with him—a sort of mania——"

"Then you think, Rose," Cecy inferred, with a keen look, as the other paused, "you think that Clyde had that in mind when he married you?"

Rose had not intended to admit so much; she was reluctant to admit it even to her own thoughts. But she was fairly caught, and it was with a rather forlorn attempt at a smile that she looked bravely at her sister.

"Well, perhaps I flattered myself that there were other reasons, too!" she assured her, whimsically.

Cecy looked at her, beautiful, young, exquisite in her blue cotton and broad-brimmed hat, with all the goodness and sweetness, the courage and unselfishness and intelligence that she knew were Rose's looking out of her blue eyes, and a sudden thickness came into the loyal little sister's throat.

"Rosalind, you're the most wonderful person in the world!" she said, laughing a little huskily.

"Ah, well, that's a nice thing for you to tell me," said, smiling, but also a little stirred.

not only me," Cecy began, warmly. "Everyone town says the same thing. Why, the very sales- in the shops are crazy about you; the Terrys just nk you're an angel! And Amy Rogers said that they ould have made you president of the club, right over

the heads of all those older fuddiduds, but that Clyde doesn't want you to hold any office. Juliet Forbes says that they're all perfectly crazy to get you to come to things, and here you stick in this—this mausoleum!—with a—a—a man who does nothing but snub you and separate you from your family and just—just break your heart! Why, do you suppose," Cecy sputtered on, wiping her eyes openly now, "do you suppose that I would be engaged to Bozzy and having them all make a fuss about me if it hadn't been for all you've done for me?—you talked me out of my engagement to Rutherford Le Grand, with the 'Twin Beds' company, two years ago!—and helping me with my clothes, and everything! I watched the people looking after you when you came out of church, Sunday——"

"Oh, Cecy, Cecy, don't!" Rose interrupted, half-laughing and half-crying. "If I really have done anything for you and Mom and Ned, my darling, that makes everything worth while!" she added, with her eyes shining.

"Rose," Cecy said, suddenly, "must it always be like this—this death in life? Isn't there—I don't necessarily mean divorce!—but isn't there such a thing as a separation—you and Mary in one of those little pink Spanish plaster houses out near Mom——?"

Rose had risen and was standing with her back half-turned to her sister and her gaze far away, across the fence, across the unlovely jumble of State Street, below the old quarry, across the sluggish river, and upon the far purple line of the encircling hills that were like transparent lavender tissue to-day.

Did she think, as she stood there, of what it would mean to take her baby in her arms and leave this house

of suffering and loneliness for ever, to find herself in bright small rooms with flowers blooming all about them and family and neighbours near? What it would be like to eat what she liked, to say what she liked, to read and dream in her own way, forbidden now these many years?

Perhaps it was at this exact moment that the thought came to Rose, the definite, weary, rebellious thought that separated her and her child once and for all from Clyde.

But if it did she gave no sign to the uneasily watchful Cecy when presently she spoke. Resolutely behind her Rose put the memory of solitary hours, of cruel words, of biting criticism, misunderstanding, rebuff. Nobody but herself knew of them, nobody would ever know.

"I've thought of that, Cecy, believe me!" she said, in a low troubled tone after a silence. "Not—not in any sense as a reflection on Clyde, or in revenge, because he is as unhappy as—as he can be now, of course! But Clyde would never consent."

"But why not?" Cecy asked, impatiently.

"Oh, his self-respect, my dear! His standing before the community. To have his wife and child leave him——! He is passionately ambitious, you know. And then besides," Rose finished, with a smile that had something of her old mischief in it, "he might find the old contract, you know, and then where would he be! And Cecy," she said, finally, with a suddenly grave face, and a kiss for the baby she had caught up into her arms, "while I have Mary, nothing else matters! I'm almost glad, sometimes, that my life is so—so empty and so hard, and so lonely, because it gives her more to me, every breath she draws, every little garment and meal

and nap—is *mine*. She and I have roomed together since she was so ill, last winter—we are never apart—I would do it all again, I would have it twice as hard—for her!"

An hour later, with the baby toddling between them, they went out into the comparative openness of Santa Clara Street and Upper River Street, and Cecy at last drew a long breath of relief. The trees were friendly here, affording long glimpses of pleasant barns and blooming gardens through their great branches. The Rogers house and the Terry house, all the aristocratic houses of Gates Mill were grouped here, and Rose experienced a sudden great emotion of real delight thinking of Cecy as established here and rejoicing that her beloved little sister's life had fallen into such ideal lines.

Bozzy was fat, and he was not clever, but he was a sweet, simple fellow, generous and kindly, and Cecy was not so smart that she would leave him behind her as the years went by. They would have their home and their car, and their vacations at Fallen Leaf Lake, their card parties and tennis matches, and some day their nice children, who would love Aunt Rose——

This afternoon Mrs. Terry had formally asked in the neighbourhood "to meet Miss Cecilia Kirby." Everybody knew Cecy Kirby, of course, and everybody knew exactly what her name penned upon old Mrs. Terry's card in this fashion meant. Cecy and Rosalind were aware of parked cars, fluttering summer gowns, and an air of great festivity about the comfortable old wooden house with its porches and its magnificent gardens as they came in.

Cecy had on her prettiest frock of pink crêpe-de-chine;

a white hat with pink roses on it was pressed against her soft dark hair; she looked shy, young, radiant, standing beside the older women, as good wishes and congratulations were showered upon her. It was one of the great days of Cecy's life; Rose was secretly pleased to find the bride-elect and her promised husband concealed in the pantry, late in the afternoon, eating macaroons, talking absorbedly, and lost to everything but each other's company.

"Gosh, wasn't it fierce, Rose?" Bozzy asked, fervently, and Cecy said positively:

"We have decided never to be engaged again, Sis. Once is enough!"

"No spoiling, no budding snobbishness there!" Rose thought, thankfully, as she left them to their cakes and went upon her way to find her baby, who had been confided to the agreeable company of the one small Rogers seven-year-old and the three little Terry grandchildren. Crossing the side lawn, in the long, sweet shadows of the dying day, she met the older Mrs. Talbot with Jack and Edith.

Rose's heart always gave a little twist of pleasure when she saw Jack. It did not happen often, for she rarely went to the office, and for the past two or three years her trips to market and shops, and long quiet afternoons with her mother, had been the chief of Rose's reasons for leaving her house at all. The big figure was dressed in white flannels to-day; Rose knew just the tilt of the straw hat, and the touch of the lean, strong hand in greeting. But Jack, at thirty-two, was older; there was some gray in his heavy shock of fair hair, and his expression had lost something of its old grinning, boyish serenity.

Edith was just the same; she was one of those attractively slim young girls who seem to harden, at seventeen or eighteen, into a very mould of lifeless, toneless, characterless adolescence. She had always been colourless, flat-breasted, sleek-haired, complacently ignorant and undeveloped, and she always would be—priding herself upon mediocre attainments, satisfied with little catch phrases for the vital things of life, unable to see, feel, or understand anything that did not immediately affect herself.

She was furious to-day for two reasons, or at least for two causes that seemed reasons for ill-temper, to her.

Her first reason was that for several weeks, for almost three months, she had been aware of a disquieting suspicion that had grown stronger and stronger, terminating with the definite knowledge that she was to have a child. Edith had always spoken of this possibility casually: "If we have kiddies" was indeed a favourite expression with her.

But now, after five years of marriage, nature had taken her unawares, and Edith resented it bitterly. She had never been ill, and she felt sick and wretched and blue and cold and miserable now, almost all the time, and she resented that, too. It had been a favourite hallucination of hers that she could experience motherhood "without knowing it."

Athletic, boyishly built, and feeling a profound distaste for being watched, babied, for being even in the least degree helpless or dependent, she loathed her new rôle. To divert her mother-in-law's fluttering surveillance at breakfast Edith made herself faint with nauseous coffee and eggs whose mere appearance made her turn pale. At the mere mention of hospital,

flannels, "your condition," "sweet new responsibilities," she writhed.

The crowning indignity was when Newman, the doctor whose word was law in all the nurseries of Gates Mill, forbade dancing, diving, tennis, and horseback riding. Edith listened to him sullenly, quoted him with hot scorn, and assured the anxious Jack that she hadn't the remotest notion of obeying the poor old mollie!

In the second place, Edith bitterly resented the fuss that all her world had been making of late over Cecy Kirby's engagement to Bozzy Terry.

Edith had had all this pleasant adulation once, and had accepted it complacently, as her due. Five years ago, at eighteen, it had been her pleasant privilege to draw Jack Talbot away from his silly infatuation for Rose Kirby, and prettily to accept dinner parties, engagement cups, and all the admiration and honour of making a brilliant match. Cecy Kirby had been only a year younger than she, but what bottomless chasms of education, position, advantage, had seemed to separate the two girls!

Now Cecy had captured the richest boy in town, and a nice boy, too, if one didn't mind Bozzy's being fat and rather silly. And to this obscure little Gates Mill belle was coming even more than the normal amount of delightful, youthful excitement, Edith felt. Old Mrs. Terry, who seemed to have no usual maternal jealousies or resentment, had taken the girl to her heart, and everybody, Edith supposed wearily and scornfully, would have to follow suit. It was all so sickeningly tiresome! To add to her annoyance, Rose, the slighted older [illegible] had married Clyde Bainbridge, Jack's partner

and adviser, and a stockholder in the Talbot Iron Works. So that these obnoxious Kirbys——

"Hello, Rose," Edith said, smilingly; "nice to see you!"

"Hello, Edith—how do you do, Mrs. Talbot?" Rose returned, and raising her eyes to the quietly watching man, and with a little deepening of her smile she added: "Jack."

"Proud of your little sister?—but I know you are!" he asked, holding her hand, and looking down at her affectionately.

"Glad she's so happy!" Rose amended.

"I didn't think Cecy would marry at all," Edith contributed, in her quick, smooth voice. "Of course, she's not very *old*——"

Rose merely smiled at her and did not answer, and Jack thought of the quick, indignant defence that would have flashed forth six years ago, and told himself that he knew in what school Rose had learned this hard lesson of silence.

She stood smiling pleasantly at the two women of his household, beautiful little friendly Rose, who looked like a child to-day in a white mull frock, with a blue lining to her white summer hat. He noted the kindness of the wonderful eyes that just matched the hat, and the exquisite glow on the velvet-smooth cheeks. Edith and his mother had been quarrelling, not bitterly or loudly, but in icy undertones and suppressed asides, and in contrast Rose's radiant happiness in her sister's happiness seemed heart-warming.

His mother had had a small apartment in Gates Mill for a time, but loneliness and resourcelessness had driven her back for one of her periodic visits to her own old

home. The house would have sheltered a score of mothers and wives, but was too small for these two women, who each had to have at least one private interview with Jack daily, to "simply explain" some misunderstanding, or to ask his "unbiassed opinion" about some altercation between them.

"How old is Cecy?" he asked now, smilingly.

"Twenty-two," Rose answered, without comment.

"I married at eighteen!" Edith said, quickly. "Aren't you coming in, Jack? We're late enough now, I should think!"

"Come see me, Rose, and bring that dear baby!" the elder Mrs. Talbot said, partly because she really was lonely and not very well, and partly with an instinctive willingness to annoy Edith. "Beautiful girl!" she added, admiringly, as the three parted from Rose, who went upon her way toward the sound of children's voices.

"Jack thinks so!" Edith agreed, viciously. Jack made no comment.

CHAPTER XXIII

Cecy's question of earlier in the afternoon was still thrilling in Rose's thoughts as she went. A little cottage, a little garden and peace of mind—and Mary. How wonderful that might be! But for Mary she knew that she must have sought this peace, this little cottage, long ago. Not, ran her thoughts now, in the pleasant quiet of this deserted back garden, not to defraud Clyde—Clyde, granting that they had ever found the old contract, might have all the property interests, and welcome! Cecy would be a rich woman, now, and Ned, at nineteen, was working his way through the agricultural college at Davis and promised to make a fine, good man, like his father and grandfather before him. Mom and Audrey had gone down with Ned for a few days' thrilling stay in the college town before the term opened. Mom would never be practical or a good manager. But all of Rose's inflexibly small but unfailing allowance was at her disposal in emergencies, and Cecy had been earning an astonishing seventy-five dollars a month for more than a year.

So, materially speaking, the Kirbys flourished—with the old house sold, the boy steady and smart, and two of the girls married to rich men!

"And to think," Rose mused, with a rueful smile, "that the money end of it ever seemed important!"

Ah, what would she not give for one hour of the old impecunious gaiety, the pressed little draggled gowns,

the scrambled, hot, delicious meals, the chatter, the laughter, the great hopes and dreams! Herself only a girl—free—happy, flinging herself exhausted into the broad old bed beside Cecy at night and drawing down into her warm young loving arms the adoring mother who came in gently to wake her every morning!

She turned a corner by the old windmill; the children were having a little tea party of their own. There were five of them, a small Rogers, three small Terrys, and Mary Bainbridge, the youngest of all.

Rose had been so rarely separated, even for hours, from her baby that she experienced a delightful thrill upon rediscovering her: her little, happy, busy Mary, so pleased to find herself among these strange gods and goddesses who were four and five, and even seven!

The cocoa and sponge cake were things of the past; Mary was now rapturously sucking, eying, and sucking again, a somewhat slimy lump of taffy. Rose, with the assistance of the windmill faucet and the sympathetic old nurse, washed the blooming little face and the brown baby hands, Mary's eyes roving interestedly above the towel and her mother's fingers as she did so. Then they said good-bye to this world of delights and walked out of the side gate into a deep lane that was laced by streams of low sunlight, through elm and eucalyptus trees. The ground here was carpeted with the pale-brown sickles of the leaves, and sweet with aromatic fragrance.

Presently Mary's little dangling left hand was caught by a big brown one, into which she clasped it confidingly. Rose looked up to see that Jack had joined them.

"Oh, you didn't see Cecy?"

"Oh, but I did! Mother and Edith couldn't stay

long. I took them home, and Edith sent me back for her beaded bag."

He displayed it, dropped it again into his pocket.

"Don't you love this bit of lane?"

"Always have!"

"Jack, how beautiful the world could be—if we were only simpler! If worries and things didn't keep us from seeing it!"

"I was thinking that," he said "Yesterday I had to go and look at a little piece of property up above the Dam—my father took it on a bad debt, years ago—I suppose the three acres wouldn't bring twenty dollars at auction! But there's a two-room cabin there; it's been empty for years, but it's solid, and winds and rain have cleaned it out like a shell. There's a view over the valley, and trees, and all that; the old fellow that lived there had a little out-of-door fireplace. My Lord, it was peaceful and sweet up there! The creek runs about ten feet from the door, and I suppose I saw a thousand quail. It's all smooth grassy slopes under oaks—— Rose, I wonder if we couldn't all take our lunch up there some day! Could you do that some Saturday afternoon, or Sunday?"

She smiled sympathetically, slowly shaking her head.

"But it sounds like Paradise, Jack!"

He stopped short in the lane, looking at her with a faint frown.

"Clyde wouldn't—no, I suppose he wouldn't!"

"He doesn't care for that sort of thing, you know!" Rose said, mildly. But in her mind was a distinct vision of Clyde, nervous, irritable, unsympathetic, instantly and forcibly resenting her temerity in merely suggesting anything so utterly ridiculous.

"You couldn't—I suppose you couldn't go without him?"

She could laugh at him quite naturally.

"I could not."

"Rose," Jack diverged suddenly, "did it ever occur to you that he—he isn't quite—well, what shall I say? I work in the office with him you know, and I give you my word that there are days when he doesn't seem——"

"Quite normal?" she asked, simply. "Oh, yes, I think that after one of his frightful headaches, when he has been using those pills, and then has to stop for a day or two, he is suffering such nervous—such nervous agonies that he hardly knows what he is doing or saying!" she conceded, charitably.

"Well," Jack persisted, "he oughtn't to take that stuff. You know sometimes I have to carry the whole responsibility at the Works," he finished, apologetically. "And Clyde hates that, hates to feel he can't prevent it! He locks up papers in the safe——"

"Yes, I know. It's too bad he is leaving it so much to you, Jack!" Rose said, as he paused.

"Oh, no, that part of it's fine! I'm tickled to death to get the hang of the whole thing; I should have done it years ago," Jack protested, hastily. "Everything is going splendidly, and I like to feel that my father would have been proud of me!" he added, simply. "But it's on—your account, Rose. It doesn't seem right to let Clyde go on getting more and more—nervous——"

"He may get over these headaches. Anyway, Newman gave him the pills, and I suppose thousands and thousands of people are taking them all the time," she answered, so mildly and so thoughtfully, that Jack felt

a sudden great rush of heartache for the kind and generous heart that life had treated so harshly.

"Rose," he said, in a tone she had not heard for years; the tone through which a conversation suddenly becomes personal and even intimate, "life hasn't been what we thought it was going to be, has it?"

They had crossed Upper River Street now, and turned into Santa Clara Street. She gave him a long, penetrating look from her matchless blue eyes.

"Jack, isn't it strange?"

The sunburned lean face, smiling at her, was softened suddenly by what she remembered as its pleasantest expression, the expression that meant that Jack was serious, that into his joyous, irresponsible brain had entered the consciousness of what he himself was, and what Rose was, and what they were to each other.

"Do you ever think of the old days?" he asked.

"Oh—sometimes," she answered, with a little hesitation, and in a tone that did not encourage him.

"Where was your mother to-day?" Jack asked, after a pause.

"She and Audrey—you remember little Audrey?"

"The I. S. L.? I should say I do!" Jack said, laughing, and off guard. Immediately he turned red, and Rose's colour came up in a wave. They had called giddy little chattering Audrey his "Idiot Sister-in-law," years ago.

Rose wanted to say something quick and irrelevant, but no words came, and Jack was equally disconcerted, so that they stood there for a minute flushed and smiling, and looking oddly at each other.

"Ned going to be a farmer?" the man questioned her.

"A forester, he says. Doesn't it sound nice? He

met one of the big government foresters last year, and he hasn't talked of anything else since."

"I envy him!" Jack said, suddenly and half-seriously.

"I envy any one"—Rose's brow knitted a little, and she looked into space as if she were feeling for words—"any one who has it all before him," she went on. "His mistakes all to make!"

"He'll make them," Jack predicted, a little grimly.

A motor car turned into Santa Clara Street, and he saw her start nervously, as if its driver might be unwelcome. But it was only Hellman's delivery wagon, and they could continue their conversation uninterrupted.

"All lives aren't mistakes, Jack, are they?" she asked.

"I don't know. No, of course not!" he answered. "Amy, now, and Juliet, and the Newmans—some people seem to be really, deeply happy, Rose. The Cutters, with that bunch of little boys——"

"Yes, I know!" she agreed, eagerly, as if she were glad to be convinced.

The sky behind her was glorious with colour, against which the trees of the Bainbridge garden cut a sharp silhouette. There was a sort of luminous green twilight beside the big dry evergreen hedge, and in the pool of sunlight at the street's end columns of tiny insects were buzzing up and down in the late afternoon sunshine. Shafts of coloured glory pierced and interlaced the overgrown gloom of the little street, and in this perfumed, windless hour, when not a leaf turned on a tree, and when the birds, already going to bed, were hopping from bush to bush, Jack thought he had never seen anything so beautiful as her face.

"If someone had made a mistake that affected you,

Rose," he said, almost against his will, yet eagerly, too, "would you—let him say—that he was sorry?"

"No," she answered, slowly, and smiling, "I think not. I think I would want him to know that any harm he did me was forgotten and forgiven long ago."

"You told him he would live to pay bitterly for what he did, Rose, do you remember?"

"Oh, too well! I have been so often sorry—so often ashamed to remember it!"

She had lifted Mary, weary and sleepy from a day of too many joys, to the broad upper bar of the fence, and now stood holding the soft little drooping body against her shoulder.

"I think of it—think of it—think of it," Jack said. "Sometimes I would be glad to think that—cad that I was, arrogant ass that I was—you had forgiven me."

She gave him a composed, affectionate look, this splendid big man in white flannels who stood so close beside her, and there was no wavering in her eyes, no trembling in her kindly voice.

"Shall we—forgive each other?" she said. "It would make me happier, too. Looking at Mary—I haven't wanted to remember that I ever said I hated—anybody, Jack, or wished him any harm!"

She put out her hand, and his big ones grasped it. Then quite simply she declined his offer to carry the child into the house and nodded him her thanks over her shoulder when he opened, and then closed, the gate. He watched her go steadily up the path, her white hat pushed a little askew by the child's head, and the dark rich baby curls pressing against the heavy rippling burned-gold of her hair.

A blankness, a dreariness, seemed to fall upon the

earth. Walking home slowly in the dusk Jack felt the years long ahead of him and a steadily gnawing pain in his heart.

Rose meanwhile had taken the child to the side door and staggered with her up the back stairway. Her face was crimson and she was breathing hard as she slipped the soft little boneless baby into the crib. A cool thin nightgown for Mary, and the unconscious little face wiped and dried, and Rose was free to move about the cool, airy back chamber putting away the soft little garments that still held so deliciously the imprint of the baby's body.

The best romper went upon a tiny padded hanger, and the checked red gingham was brought out for the morning, and the scuffed little sandals, and the red and white socks. Rose did not fuss with her baby, but Mary's clothing was all comfortable, and suitable, and deliciously crisp and simple. Her mother, handling microscopic underwear and footwear to-night, pressed more than one small garment to her lips.

"I shall have to ask you to stop making that frightful racket!" Clyde Bainbridge's voice, as he stood in the nursery doorway, with his hair rumpled, and his face oily and dark from unrestful sleep, made his wife jump guiltily. She had been humming.

"I didn't know you were at home, Clyde!" she said, in a hushed, apologetic tone, as she slipped from the room and followed him into his own apartment.

He had flung himself back upon the tumbled bed; he spoke sourly.

"Because you were over at the Terrys', letting those

snobs patronize you, bootlicking—crawling at their feet to get to be one of them!"

Rose, straightening the room generally, with noiseless feet and quick fingers, saw the powder-streaked glass beside him.

"Oh, dear—another headache!" she lamented.

"Kindly don't use that utterly hypocritical tone!" he requested, freezingly, from the hot pillows and comforters in which he was tossing.

She knew that he was weary and hungry, as well as in pain, and half-drugged with sleep and medicine.

"I am sorry, dear. I had no idea you were home!"

"Well, did you get what you went after? Did those people who wouldn't speak to you when I married you condescend to drink tea with you?"

"It was a delightful tea," Rose said, hanging up her best frock and buttoning herself into a clean stiff gingham. "Cecy came here first and we walked over together. She looked stunning."

"That's her sister's opinion," Clyde said, sneeringly. "Talbots there?"

"Oh, yes!"

"See Jack?"

Rose's brain, taught by previous experience, worked swiftly. Clyde's windows gave upon the front gate, it was possible that he had seen Jack standing there with her half-an-hour ago.

"Oh, yes!"

He muttered, made no further comment. In a few more seconds his heavy, uncomfortable breathing told her that he was asleep. Rose went downstairs, picked up her French grammar, and settled herself comfort-

ably at the dining-room window that looked out directly over the cliff.

There were perhaps two feet of packed plumbago and heliotrope and marigolds, all tangled together under the window, and then the slightly protruding ends of the great beams that braced the bulkhead, smothered in hard, dusty, dry ivy leaves. Beyond was the hundred-foot drop, and the gashed and pocketed old quarry, and then friendly, cluttered, disorderly State Street where Rose's glance would rest contentedly for half-hours together, while her thoughts wandered back and forth between the future and the past.

She was near enough to see the factory girls coming and going with arms locked, the street gang of small boys rejoicing in their crimes, the bareheaded women who ran to the delicacy store, and the men who came home in twos and threes at just this hour. In the evenings the light-flooded jaws of the movie-house sucked in a stream of happy persons, and the candy stores sent wavering beams across the broken sidewalks and the gathered rubbish.

To-night she would not light the gas; she did not open her book. She sat at the open window, dreaming, her thoughts wandering happily from darling little Cecy's happy prospects, from her beauty and her success, to the pleasantly filled tearoom, and all the friendly, rustling women. She remembered the sunset light in the windmill yard where little Mary was having one of her first social teas, and the talk with Jack in the lane that was laced with gold shafts of sunshine swimming and throbbing with motes. She remembered the sweet dry scent of the eucalyptus leaves, and Jack telling her of the little cabin up beyond the Dam——

What a place for joy and peace such a little cabin would be! But then, thought Rose, what charm any place would have if more persons were like Jack—so kind, so understanding, so friendly.

If she could once get rid of this continual oppression —this smothering sense of nervous dependence upon the mood of another person, perhaps everything might go better. Clyde could not kill her, after all, and since he was bound to have rages, anyway, to be coldly unresponsive and suppressive, anyway, why not muster up one's courage to laugh at him—to ignore him—to teach him that he was wasting time?

The week he had been in Los Angeles, a year ago—what a glorious seven days that had been! He had left Rose strict directions as to what she should do in his absence, but a slight cold on her mother's part had been sufficient excuse for her utterly to disregard them.

She had picked Mary up bodily, and flown to the little cottage at Union Junction where her mother lived, and here, packed into the six-room building in utter gaiety and satisfaction, she and her mother and sisters, her brother and grandfather had enjoyed a glorious visit that made these simple persons who idolized her say that their old Rose had come back.

Washing dishes, slipping off to movies in the old way, making her famous prune whip and raisin biscuit, talking, talking, talking, kissing whomsoever she chanced to pass as she went from bedrooms to kitchen, and kitchen to yard—how ecstatically happy Rose had been!

She had mentioned Clyde only casually and pleasantly, and her mother and Cecy knew that she was glad not to think about him, to revel in her child and her own people with no shadow of his casting over her mood.

When he had returned there had been explanations.

"You make me ridiculous in the eyes of the entire town," he had said, angrily. "Leaving my house——"

"Oh, Clyde, Mom was really sick!"

"I thought you said that the Renfrews and the Parrotts and the Weeds came in the last night?"

"Well, she was better. And I went all through the horsehair trunk again," Rose had added, adroitly. He was always alert at the hint of any possibility of her finding the document that would give him a hold upon the Talbots of the Iron Works. He had fallen into her trap, as he did over and over again.

She wondered to-night, and not for the first time, how any human being could be so consistently disagreeable. It seemed to her incredible, even after four years of it, that there could be no mood in which he was gentle, contented, generous, kind.

Sometimes he talked to her forcibly, and with sufficient civility, about some business matter that especially interested him, or criticized some purchase, divorce, marriage, or investment upon the part of their various friends and acquaintances in Gates Mill.

But Rose had not only to agree with him, to preserve peace she must actually feed his point of view. Judge Raymond was a fool; old Pottle was throwing money away; Mayor Rudolph was simply making a laughingstock of himself.

To argue, to protest, to defend an old friend, however mildly and logically, was to infuriate him. He would tell her without preamble that she was entirely ignorant of the subject, that she had secondary reasons for her opinions, that she and her entire family were

contemptible failures, and that to hear her talk so idiotically disgusted him.

This was their nearest approach to congenial companionship, in any case. For the rest Clyde was unwaveringly dissatisfied, critical, bitterly scornful, cold. He did not believe what she said or listen to it half the time, and anxious as she was to preserve a smooth surface and make little Mary's first impressions what they ought to be, Rose felt herself driven over and over again to actual desperation.

There had been a time, when the baby was about six months old, when in a fury of anger and despair she had threatened him with divorce. But the child was his weapon there, and he was quick to use it. Certainly she could have Mary half the year, if she insisted upon it, but Mary's father would have her the other half.

Clyde was, in the eyes of the world, only a somewhat reserved and quiet man, successful almost to the sensational point with his business, devoted to his home, wife, and child. He made Rose an allowance, as any clerk in the Rogers's Bank could testify, he was faithfulness, integrity, honour itself. Perhaps he was a little jealous, as became the husband of so beautiful a woman, but that was forgivable, after all. He had married a poor girl with a large, shiftless, dependent family on her shoulders, and he had surely been an ideal son to Mrs. Kirby, selling that old house and managing the purchase of the new one.

So said Gates Mill, and Rose, pondering these things in cold blood, knew that she could never get a divorce—not while Mary was so tiny, anyway, and while the delicious little upper lip trembled so pitifully at even a raised voice. Rose could imagine Clyde, the dignified

payer of bills and holder of property, one of the prominent men of Gates Mill, quietly telling a puzzled judge that he had always loved his wife, tried to do his best for her, and that he had pleaded with Mrs. Bainbridge to remain in her good home, where there was a baby, and a servant, and a motor car—enough, one would think, to satisfy her——

If she left him she must live on his money for the ten years of Mary's babyhood, or go to work and impose the burden of the child upon Mom and Grandpa——

No, the thoughts under this head always went round and round in a circle. For everybody's sake she must be strong.

So Rose was silent, was long-suffering, bore the slights and slurs in quiet dignity, learned to live for her child, her books, the casual interests of club or town life that overflowed where she could pick them up.

When she was asked to dinner parties she learned to say prettily that "Mr. Bainbridge was so busy now, and so tired, and was having these troublesome headaches." When she was implored to join a committee, she explained that she had a young child—so much to do at home. When she was irresistibly drawn into friendship with some poor girl in the County Hospital, or some struggling little factory wife whose baby-crowded home was near by, down the steep quarry steps into State Street, she made her excuses courageously:

"I'm so sorry, Mrs. Johnson. But Mr. Bainbridge feels that I am over-tiring myself, and he asked me not to come down here for awhile. Presently I'll be back!"

It was all very simple, after all. Rose grasped what she could: the occasional club meeting that sent her home feeling warmed by friendship and work, the after-

noons with her mother, the motor trips with Audrey and the baby, when Clyde sometimes left her the car. And, with a sort of sorrowful wonder, she found that hers was not the only difficult life, that there were other women for whom the real flavour and glory of living had fled, that many a pretty spring gown and smart new hat were worn in patient courage, or bravado, or faith, or all three.

That there were good and sweet and kindly men, who laughed at small domestic accidents, who would button a baby into her best coat and whistle as they stole olives from the luncheon a happy wife was packing, she gladly believed. Pleasant men, none too successful financially, perhaps, but so genial as they soused little lawns with squirming hoses, or praised the chocolate cake that a woman in a bungalow apron brought out for inspection.

"Mr. Swann is just an angel to my mother," said a club friend, with tears in her eyes. "George gets home, and gets his good hot meal inside him, and Busty goes off to sleep in his arms," said Agnes Parrott, now prosaically wedded to a humble clerk and modestly established in a little side-street cottage, "and he forgets we have any worries, and half-an-hour after he's been just in black despair, he'll ask me, 'Ag, do we thank God enough for each other, and this little fellow?'"

Rosalind liked to think of these things, to come home through bustling River Street in the late afternoon, when all the little cars were coughing and chugging, when the post office showed a line of waiting husbands and fathers, adjured at breakfast to bring home the mail, and when the bakery and delicacy store

showed such homely, heartening activity. The sheets of graham rolls, the peach pies and German snakes—how perspiring, lean, weary Mrs. Cullinan snatched them from the window and wrapped them with the help of that left hand, so fascinating to the children, that had lost three fingers!

Little shabby houses gushing light into shabby front yards—ah, some of them were holding happiness! One heard laughter from them, children boiled over the back "stoops," disappeared inside again. And even the bigger houses, the Terrys', the younger Rogerses' house, the Barkers', and the Newmans'—life in these was sweet and friendly and normal despite occasional storms.

She knew, as she waited for him to-night, that Clyde would come downstairs with some crushing remark upon his tongue. He would always eat heartily and critically, headache or no headache, and Rose used to experience a sense almost of terror as she considered the effect upon him of pain, drugs, fatigue, and worst of all, vicious ill-temper. Sometimes she thought of this last as a definite poison within him, yellow, crawling, pervading every fibre of body and soul.

"Aren't you going to eat?" he asked, harshly, coming into the room just as Datchi lighted the gas.

"Yes, dear. Didn't realize that it was quite time!"

She led the way to the blank, spacious, yellow-wood-finished dining room. The china was cheap, thick white ware, sprigged with brown ferns. There were soda crackers on a plate, a little jar of flowers in the centre.

"Take these damn' flowers away!" Clyde said, irritably, to the boy. "They smell frightful!" And

crumbling his cracker into his soup he asked, in a heavy, patient tone: "Is there any other flower we could have on the table except that one? I think I've spoken of this before——"

"That's heliotrope, Clyde; to me it's delicious!"

"Well, to me it's extremely disgusting."

Silence. But she knew it would not last.

"I asked you a question, Rose. It's extremely annoying to have you utterly ignore me. I asked if it was possible to have some less strong flower on the table?"

"Why, surely," his wife's voice said, steadily, after an almost imperceptible pause.

"Will you see about it?"

Rose's instinct was to burst forth furiously: "Who else would see about it? Will you shut up, or do you want me to leave the table?"

But this method never was effective with Clyde. It led only to hideous silences, to a hundred ugly little acts on his part to inconvenience her and annoy her, to complete apologies from Rose for what she had never said, or felt, or done, and to half-hearted reconciliations that did not wipe out the bitterness she felt.

So she reminded herself for the hundredth—the thousandth—time, that this was but his unfortunate manner, and answered pacifically:

"Yes, dear, I will!"

"I should like to have your promise on that," Clyde said, slowly and importantly.

"All finished, Datchi," Rose said to the boy.

"Did you hear me, or are you simply trying to be annoying?" her husband asked her, in a measured, almost menacing tone.

"Yes, dear, and I will see to it that we have some flower that has no odour!" Rose answered, briskly, beginning to serve a pudding.

"Thank you," he said. "You could do these things more graciously, you know," he added, in an admonitory tone.

Only manner, of course, but somehow these insignificant little encounters were infinitely exhausting and boresome.

"What did you do with Mary while you were at the party?"

"Oh, I took her! She was lovely. She played with the Dick Terry's babies."

"Did she eat anything there?"

"She had supper with them—cocoa and sponge cake and bread and butter."

"I devoutly trust you are not serious, Rose?"

"Certainly I am. Why not?"

"Knowing my objection to having my child indiscriminately fed by anybody and everybody, and stuffing herself between meals, you didn't allow her to eat the sort of food those Terry children get?" Clyde, who always expressed a deep devotion to the interests of his baby daughter, although usually too busy to show it, began warningly.

"She only had what she would have at home, Clyde."

There was a terrible silence, during which Rose pretended to eat her dessert unconcernedly.

"Now, look here," he said in a deep, controlled voice, as he rose from the table, "I am going to express myself once and for all about this, and I assure you right now that I expect my wishes to be respected! If you

can't protect Mary from the weakness and the vacillation that is a characteristic of every member of your family, I can! I can go to Amy Rogers or Sue Terry and ask them—*ask them*, as a favour to me—to protect my child from her mother's utter shiftless weakness where her safety and health are concerned! Do you understand me?"

Rosalind assured him that she did, and carried the despised heliotrope into the garden, consoling herself with the thought that next week Clyde would be in a rage because she hired little Belle Deering to stay with Mary and went to some affair without her.

"A chance for Mary to have a little pleasure and mix with other children!" he would then comment stingingly. "And you prefer to deprive her of it!"

The fact that Mary was gloriously strong and well, and that older mothers were impressed by her diet, her hours, her splendidly balanced little nerves, meant nothing to Clyde. In certain moods he disputed every detail of her food, clothing, and rule with Rose; contemptuous alike of the laws she kept and the occasional infringement she allowed.

"Good heavens, you believe any truck any old biddy will tell you!" he would exclaim, when she put cocoa butter upon the baby's sunburned little neck or moved the crib to the upstairs porch. And Rose recalled a fearful scene upon one occasion when she had quoted Amy Rogers as an authority. Young Mrs. Jack Talbot had been a Rogers, and any allusion to the Talbots infuriated Clyde. His hatred of them had been deepening and increasing steadily with the years, and Rose suspected of late that a certain application, judgment, and interest recently displayed by Jack in

the administration of the business of the Iron Works, was bitterly resented, perhaps even feared, by Clyde.

Where energy, force, determination were needed, Clyde had easily scored. But Jack had more; he had personality, flexibility, and ingenuity, and the men were beginning to shift their allegiance back to the son of the founder, who had so long been a wasteful, idle, indifferent boy, but who was beginning to come into his own at last.

CHAPTER XXIV

It was very lovely, very peaceful in the back garden, under the apple trees, and safe and high above State Street. The west was still glowing warmly with lavender and rose and sombre ultramarine, and there was a sympathetic arc of tender colour in the eastern sky. The air was warm, but a little breeze had come up with the dusk, and it brought to Rose the odour of fragrant hayfields from far across the river. There was light enough to see the whitewashed tree trunks gleaming palely, and the dull blocks of shade that were shrubs, and while Rose gathered great La Marque roses in the soft gloom the moon rose, pale and large, above the tree-tops in Santa Clara Street, and sent dim shadows over the grass.

She had not told Clyde about the Talbot baby, she recalled suddenly—she must pretend that she had just heard of it, although hints and half-suggestions had apprised her of the situation several weeks ago. Perhaps Clyde knew now, through something said at the Works; if he did, it was extremely likely that he would not have told her. He would resent it, especially if Edith's baby was a son. He resented everything the Talbots had and did, and watched them with that acute absorption possible only to jealousy and dislike.

The thought of the Talbots brought Jack again to her mind, and she recalled with a sort of restful pleasure his interested, friendly voice, to-day, his big form mov-

ing at its loose-jointed, leisurely pace beside her in the lane, the sunset in his burned face as he delayed her at the gate for just those few words of explanation and adjustment.

Rose had at last reached the point when she could dismiss Clyde's unreasonableness serenely, permitting it to leave no scar upon her soul or her mood. The instant the fretful voice ceased she was withdrawn into herself again, into a region where there was always peace. Sometimes even while he was speaking she found herself quietly praying, quietly repeating the magic words "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," and always, night and morning, she went upon her knees and asked humbly for courage and wisdom for the inevitable trials of the day.

Not without tears, not without hours of bitter impatience and rebellion had she reached this point. But she had won her soul now, and was free to take gratefully whatever joys life brought her, when the hard duty was painstakingly fulfilled. So that to-night she could reflect peacefully upon her riches; the lovely little daughter asleep upstairs; the happy outcome of Cecy's problems, with all the satisfaction that Cecy's happiness would bring her sister and mother; the gravity and steadiness with which Ned had taken up his work; the simple pleasure that restful nights, meals, hours in the garden, marketing and walking with the baby gave Rose herself, and lastly, the delight of having Jack Talbot's friendship and admiration once more in her life, a feeling that she had won his liking all over again, and in a saner and a truer sense.

She would never have what made life sweet to so

many women: companionship and sympathy. Clyde would never be friendly, simple, happy in any human relationship. Not hers to laugh, to bring her brother in unexpectedly to dinner, to busy herself happily with chairs and tables, and turn an old room into a new. There would never be anything unexpected, unpremeditated, in her lot as a wife; he would interrupt her most spontaneous confidence with a harsh command to keep still while he was driving in traffic, or answer her most eager outburst with a lifeless: "I don't know in the least what you are talking about. Wipe your mouth; there's a crumb on your chin!"

The trimming of the Christmas tree, the planning of a country trip that might so easily have combined business with pleasure, was a grim, hard duty to Clyde. He exacted from her nothing but silence, obedience, and assistance sternly supervised. If she said: "Mary, come to Mother!" Clyde instantly interposed: "Mary, stay where you are!" and if Rose told him: "I asked Datchi for the peaches," Clyde answered promptly and disapprovingly: "Then kindly go tell him I don't want them. I wish you would please stop interfering with my arrangements. I arranged all that with him, and it is utterly demoralizing to the boy to have you so officious!"

It would always be so; there was no changing, no regret, for Clyde. Sometimes when sleek, and well-groomed, and dignified, he went upon one knee, in church, and rested his forehead reverently upon his hand, Rose wondered what he was thinking. Did Clyde ever really look into his own soul and study what he found there by any code of love and self-abnegation and service?

Three days after Mrs. Terry's tea party for Cecy there occurred the unusual circumstance of Clyde's not being home for dinner. He telephoned Rosalind at four o'clock that he must leave for San Francisco, and would be home again the following day at noon. She would have her supper at home, of course, with Mary.

"I should much prefer not to have you leave the house unguarded, Rose," Clyde said, expectantly, of the old mansion that had stood empty upon various occasions for months at a time. "It's Datchi's night off."

"I see!" said Rose, her heart singing.

"And if you mean to ask your mother or Cecy in to dinner, tell me now," Clyde continued further.

"Oh—let me think. Why did you want to know?" Rose answered, entirely conscious of her own daring.

There was a sulphurous silence, then Clyde's voice came in that measured fashion she knew so well.

"Why do I want to know? Well, because it is my house, I suppose!"

"I see. No, I won't ask them to dinner!" Rose conceded.

"You *won't*, you say?"

"No, I won't. Mary and I will have meat cakes and tomatoes and peaches," Rose added, domestically. Half-an-hour later she and Mary light-heartedly descended the steps to the quarry, and bought all sorts of things in River Street for supper at Grandma's house.

Clyde had left the motor car at the office, of course; Mary and Rose must go out to Union Junction on the twenty-minute trolley, but that was all part of the fun. Her mother and Audrey had got home only the day before, and there were thousands of things to discuss—

Cecy's tea, and Cecy's engagement cups, and all sorts of dear and delightful family matters.

Doughnuts, because Grandpa so loved them with his coffee, and crab salad for Mom, and a whole box of caramels for Audrey; Rose could have danced as she went from shop to shop—it meant five minutes of unpleasantness with Clyde to-morrow and hours of utter felicity to-night!

And coming out of Crosset's, with her left arm already aching from bundles, her face radiant from smiles and greetings, and Mary's left hand firmly grasped in her right, she met Jack Talbot in the new big car. Jack had come downtown expecting to pick Edith up after a card party at the club, but she had gone home with Amy, and now he had stopped for some smoked salmon for his mother.

"Look at us—we're going out to Mom's on the trolley! We're on a tearing spree!"

"Get in!" He leaned over to open the front door of the car. "I'll drive you out."

"Oh, but, Jack—have you time?"

"Don't be an utter idiot. Hello, Mary—kiss Uncle Jack."

Rose, depositing her bundles in the back, and establishing herself and the baby contentedly in the front seat, had a fleeting thought that if Clyde ever heard his daughter calling Jack Talbot "uncle" he would launch forth upon a conversation likely to be memorable.

But she was happy; the early autumn world seemed good and sweet, her child was in her arms, she was homeward bound, and it was oddly thrilling to remember just how pleasant was this driving in the seat beside Jack;

just how his big hands, in their dirty light gloves, looked upon the wheel, just what flashing smiles she got when for a second his sunburned face twisted toward her.

"What smells so delicious?"

"The coffee, perhaps. I'm taking Mom a pound of her favourite. Or doughnuts, is it? Grandpa loves them."

"Lord, you make my mouth water, Rose!"

"You couldn't—I suppose—stay to supper?"

He shook his head and for a few seconds they were silent.

"I saw Edith horseback-riding like a cowboy this morning," Rose presently told him, following a natural train of thought.

"Yep." He nodded, grinned, and then slightly frowning he added: "She oughtn't to do it, either, Newman says."

"Oh, she's very healthy," Rose assured him, seriously. "If she rests——" she submitted, after a second.

"That's the worst of it; she doesn't," Jack answered. "She isn't especially—keen about it, you know," he went on, somewhat uncertainly.

"She's been a sort of little girl so long!" Rose commented, indulgently. "Jack, look, isn't that a darling little house? That's one of my favourites, with the tile roofing and the patio and all!" she said, eagerly. "Don't you love these little Spanish houses? Wouldn't you just love to take possession, as all these little families do, with a baby and a baby-coach, and an ice-cream freezer, and a few geranium slips! I just love to see them moving in!"

They talked of houses, of various friends in town, and

when Jack left her at her mother's little gate he said, enviously:

"I wish I could stay!"

"Oh, I wish you could! And, Jack, I wonder if—it's a little hard to explain, but—but—I wonder if you'd just as soon not mention this to Clyde? I didn't happen to tell him that I might bring Mary here for supper to-night——"

"I understand," he said, gently, looking down at the slim hand she had involuntarily laid upon his wrist as she spoke. And his heart gave a great plunge of pity for her.

"He might be perfectly delighted," Rose went on, loyally, "and then he might not. And I like to take my own time and place to explain things to him."

"I see, dear," the man assured her, in rather a low tone. The memory of it, the heart-warming quality of it, did not leave her for days.

The next day there was a more than ordinarily exhausting scene with Clyde, who objected to her having kept Mary out at night, even when it was explained that Mary had gone sound asleep and been brought safely home in the Weeds' car, rolled in a blanket, and without waking. But Rose weathered this, and presently it was over, although stored in his infallible memory, she knew, for many a subsequent airing and reviewing.

Then a week or two went by serenely enough, and mid-autumn came, and with it a day when she and Jack met again, this time quite alone.

It was a sunny, quiet afternoon, without a breath of air stirring, and Cecy had carried Mary off to a party at little Suzanne Terry's house, in honour of Suzanne's

fourth birthday. All this had been duly submitted to Clyde, and approved, but he had managed to arrange that Rose should not share the party, too, by asking her to take the car to the garage in River Street and wait for it while some minor adjustments and some cleaning were done.

The grimy mechanician told Rose that these would take about an hour and a half, and glancing at the garage clock, which registered just half-past three, she was deliberating over walking home, going into Miss Cartier's little side street for an unexpected hour of French, or running out for a glimpse of the baby party, after all, when Jack, again in his car, came along.

He had been in to see the freight agent about some delay or loss, and was now bound back to the office.

"Take me to Sue Terry's?" Rose asked, jumping happily into the front seat. "I'm not dressed for the party, and I told Clyde that I wasn't going, but I can have an hour there."

"Oh, but say, wasn't Sue going to drive those young ones up to River Head for their party?" Jack remembered, suddenly. Rose's face fell.

"Oh, so she was! I forgot that. There wouldn't be any one at home. Well, then, I'll tell you. Drop me at Upper River Street, that's almost on your way."

They turned out of River Street before Jack spoke. Then it was to say suddenly:

"You couldn't go up to the Dam with me, I suppose?"

"Oh, Jack, I'd love it!" Rose exclaimed, joyfully, always—he remembered—like a child for an unexpected treat. But immediately her face fell. "No, I don't see how I could," she amended, slowly.

"I've got to go up there to-day or to-morrow, to see the surveyor's posts and walk about the place. But it only takes twenty minutes to get there, and I'll not be there ten," Jack argued, suddenly fallen into a treacherous mood of youth and holiday again.

"I'd love it!" Her eyes shone. "Oh, let's!" she said, childishly. It was Monday afternoon, there would be few cars on the road, nobody at the Dam. Clyde was safe in his office, the car duly deposited at the garage for repairs, and the baby in safe hands. The chance, depending upon so many coincidences, was too good to miss. Rose, with a sigh of utter content, settled herself beside Jack for the nine-mile run.

In two minutes they were clear of the village and out between the sweet autumn farms; the fields were burned flax-yellow; the oaks threw a hot shade upon meadows stripped and shaven.

Jack gave her his quick sidewise grin, to discover that she was staring dreamily ahead, utterly content, and radiant under her broad-brimmed straw hat. Her gown was some thin dark silk, with the wide, plain white organdy collar she wore so often, and the flowers on her hat were big blue bachelor's-buttons just the colour of her eyes.

"Isn't this delicious?" she asked, as the big car moved smoothly over the shining highway. "Now that it's getting a little cooler there's nothing I love so much as this!"

"Too bad we can't do it often!" Jack observed.

"Oh, isn't it?" she agreed, simply, with a sigh.

"Fun if we had some chops and some French bread, Rose, and the old blue coffeepot?"

"Oh, don't!"

They fell into eager and easy talk; there was everything about which to exchange their views. Rose caught frequent keen glances from the eyes she knew so well, and Jack listened to the happy, interested voice as if he could never get enough of it.

And suddenly to them both there came the miracle, unwanted and entirely unsuspected. Their words began to seem magic, full of exquisite shades and meanings undreamed an hour ago. To her least syllable he listened attentively; his own words blurred and stumbled when she turned her earnest blue eyes upon him, they both stammered, laughed briefly, and were silent.

Bewildered by the sudden change in her mood, Rose got out of the car when he stopped it, above the Dam, and without words preceded him up a short steep trail chopped roughly through young live oak, sapling madrone trees, wild lilac, and tough, thickly packed manzanita.

The cabin, as he had said, was a crude little shed, but solid and whipped clean by rain and wind. They climbed the three unguarded steps to its little porch, and Rose's eyes followed the glorious sweep of the countryside below them—the blue, transparant mountains circling the smiling valley of fields and farms, the clustered trees pierced here and there by a village spire, the winding roads, and the shining stretches of the lazy river.

A violet haze was beginning to fill in the canyons, and far off, over the coast range between them and the ocean, a blanket of soft fog was lapping the mountaintops. The air was sweet and still, and redolent of pine gum and tar weed and the blended warm odours of the wood, and as they stood together, both struck silent

by the half-sensed revelation of the last half-hour, they could hear the distant delicious "cuk-cuk-curr-rr-r!" of the sentinel quail.

"Go make your inspections, Jack," said Rosalind, out of a stillness in which she had been afraid that he would hear the thundering of her heart. "You know in late August the days are much shorter!"

"I will," he agreed, obediently. "What?" he asked, turning back.

"Nothing. I didn't call you!"

They looked full at each other, and Rose saw a strange look come into his eyes, and he, on his side, saw her turn slowly pale, and paler, and still more pale. Both began to breathe a little hard, and Rose brought her half-parted lips together as if she were about to speak. But she said nothing, turning her back upon him again, and Jack, with his senses in a tumult, plunged down the surveyor's trail into the brush.

When he came back she was already established and waiting for him, in the car, and he knew at once that she was nervous, and that what she had done so naturally and spontaneously an hour ago she felt to be full of danger, and of questionable motive, now. Do what he would, he could not quite assume the casual kindly tone of a week ago—of even this afternoon.

"Look what I found, down by the lower fence!"

They both trembled as he came near her, to show her the contents of his cupped hand, and Rose, looking down, felt that she could never raise her eyes again. Any casual word of his was fraught with bewildering possibilities of ecstasy, and even the silence seemed too beautiful to be borne.

"Why—but what is it? A field mouse?"

"A baby chipmunk, I think," he said, tenderly smoothing the tiny throbbing scrap of furry life with the thumb of the big brown hand that held it. "Here, hold it, Rose!"

Her name, so pronounced, made the world go round her. She kept her eyes down as she gently received the little animal, cuddling it in the slender fingers he remembered kissing long ago.

"Was—was everything satisfactory, Jack?"

"What, dear?"

He had started away, to go about the car to his own seat. Now he turned back, and his voice seemed to hang endlessly on the little endearment.

Rose, her eyes still averted, breathed deeply. He was standing there—was he watching her? She did not know.

"I think——" she faltered, making herself look up after an eternity when the woods were utterly silent about them except for the far cry of the quail, and when the whole earth seemed to be breathing deeply and passionately in unison with their own hearts. "Hadn't we better go back?"

He stood motionless, his eyes meeting hers; he was not three feet away, breathing quick and high, as if he had been running, and with pain and puzzlement and a sort of anxious concentration in his face.

Rose experienced a sudden and utterly disquieting sense of confusion; she could not think why she was here, or why Jack was looking at her in that strangely concentrated way, or what this look that they were exchanging was betraying or revealing.

It seemed to last for ever, this moment of bewilderment in the quiet wood. Then Jack awakened with

a start from some odd enchantment, and without a word he went to his own place and they started down the hill.

But the secret, or the terrifying and chaotic beginnings of the secret, was out now, and neither could speak or even glance at the other naturally. Jack carried his car down the grade on gravity, and Rose sat in a blinding and deafening storm of emotion beside him, and both, perhaps, were honestly eager to have this overwhelming hour of revelation over, to part before further words or further looks could be exchanged.

At the foot of the hill, a quarter of a mile below the Dam, however, a different and more wretched anxiety took possession of them. For the car, having reached the end of the descent, refused to move farther.

Rose, shaken violently from thoughts she could not segregate or assimilate, and from a very whirlwind of the senses, questioned him in sudden feverish anxiety. They were eight and a half miles from Gates Mill, and it was already half-past four.

"Jack, is it gas?"

"Nope." He was at the engine, his face pale with anxiety. "No, she's full of gas, and she's got oil. There's something wrong."

He pushed his cap back, looked up at her, and smiled uneasily. She was sitting rigid on the front seat, her eyes dark with horror, her face pale.

"Jack," she said, in a voice drained of everything but utter fear. "What can we do? It's four miles to the highway, even, and then we might not be picked up at once? Jack, *save me!* Clyde—Clyde—ah, you don't know what it is! Oh, what have I done? What shall I do?"

"My darling," he said, quite unconscious of his words and frightened by her manner, "just be patient. I'll fix it! I know I can get her started."

Ashen white, she sat watching him. Ten minutes went by, and another ten, and it was almost five o'clock. Clyde was waiting for her this instant—perhaps telephoning the garage—Cecy was waiting at home with Mary——

"Jack, had we better walk? It will be dark in half an hour!"

"If what I'm trying now doesn't work," he answered, briefly, as distressed as she, "we'll have to walk! Rose, I'm sick to have let you into this, dear! Don't worry, we'll get home at seven——"

"With all the town out and hunting!" she whispered. And she buried her face in her hands.

Suddenly, seeming to roar in the deathlike stillness of the sunset, the engine of the motor car sprang to life. Jack leaped to his place, and they were flying—flying along the homeward road. Rose was too exhausted with violent feeling to make any comment, the one thing needful in life was to get home.

"Where to, Rose? Santa Clara Street?"

"No—it's only twenty-five minutes of six. Try the garage!"

"My dear, if any worry comes to you through this!"

"Ah, it was a mad—a crazy thing to do!"

"Too fast for you?"

"No, faster!"

"Clyde can't be angry about your merely taking a drive with an old friend," Jack argued, as they sped along.

"He's—he's not reasonable, you know. And what I dread—what I dread is scenes before Mary!"

"He—he—I've seen him livid with rage in the office. He never would—touch you, Rose?" Jack said, because some sick jealousy and fear made him say it.

"Oh, no!" She almost laughed her denial, but it was a troubled laugh. "If he only would!" she said, watching the road over which they seemed to make no progress.

Never had it seemed so long. Rose's heart was in her throat and seemed to be hammering out the miles. The landscape stood still; they were running between endless rows of eucalyptus; they had only got as far as that red barn at the crossroads. Round the next turn they would come in sight of the old church——

No old church. It was miles on ahead! They had yet to cross the open space before the Chinaman's——

There was no end to it. It was like a horrible dream. Fields, fences, barns, farmhouses sliding by in the dulling light, and yet they never got anywhere—they never got anywhere—and the hateful hand of the clock fairly flew——

"Rose, is there no way out for you?" Jack said, suddenly, seeing her nervous fear, sensing her devouring anxiety. "No happier solution?"

"Any solution would be happier," she said, quickly, in a low, almost abstracted tone, her eyes on the road.

The white church—the almshouse—streets—straggling cottages—another orchard—other streets——

"You mean you'd leave him?" Jack asked, after a silence, struck.

"I don't know what I'm saying to-night," she answered, confusedly, after another pause in which she desperately tried to realize where she was, and to whom speaking. "My one fear is that somehow he will find

some reason for separating me from the baby—and she would die without me, Jack!" Rose finished, on a sort of gasp.

The bridge, and State Street, and River Street at last. She insisted that he set her down three hundred feet from the garage, gave him hardly a glance in farewell. But Jack lingered to catch another glimpse of her.

For Rose rushing into the garage in the dusk there was a sudden lessening of strain that in itself made her experience almost a vertigo. She looked about fearfully.

"Is my car ready, Mr. Roper?"

"Not quite, Mis' Bainbridge. Sam, get a hustle on, there!"

The ground seemed to fail beneath her. Everything was quiet and matter-of-course in the garage; in her honour the great dangling lights sprang into bloom. The roaring in her ears subsided.

Rose sat down on a barrel; she felt dizzy.

"Did Mr. Bainbridge telephone about the car?"

"Yes'm, ten minutes ago, and he asked had you be'n in, and I says I didn't know, because I'd just come back from supper, and it was Joe who was here at five. I says I thought you had!"

Oh, God was good! God was good! Rose felt as if every bone in her body were broken, yet exquisitely relieved after almost unendurable pain. To complete her revulsion of feeling Cecy now entered the garage, leading Mary.

"Cecy, dearest, I kept you waiting hours!"

"Oh, no, you didn't, Rose. I'll get the six-o'clock trolley for home! You said half-past five, and I would have waited longer, only I knew you were here getting the car, and Amy brought us over."

"My sweetheart!" She had the baby in her arms and was kissing her as if they had been parted for weeks. "My own Mary, did you have a nice time?"

"She had just milk, and sponge cake, and two marshmallows," stated Cecy.

"My darling!" Rose kissed the bobbing little face again. "See what Mother's brought you! A baby chippy——"

"Oh, where'd you get it?" Cecy demanded, as interested as Mary was.

"Just—just picked it up beside the road!" Rose was beginning to breathe normally, and to try to appreciate just the necessities and the possibilities of the situation.

Clyde would be cross when they got home, of course, but any normal crossness would be almost pleasant now, compared in Rose's consciousness to what might have been. Her secret was not safe, of course, nothing was ever safe in a town the size of Gates Mill where everybody knew everybody, and was deeply interested in intimate personal affairs.

But she had time to breathe, to arm herself against attack, and it was with a great peace and calm flooding her spirit that she presently left Cecy at the car stop, and drove Mary home just as the Angelus was sounding from St. Mary's in the autumn dusk.

CHAPTER XXV

"WHAT was the trouble?" Clyde said, sourly, as she came in.

"Oh, just the usual delays."

"Giving you a good chance to go to the party, of course?"

"No, I didn't go to the party," Rose said. "I'm always glad of an extra hour of French!" she added, after a second. "I met Jack Talbot in his car, and he offered to drive me home or to take me to Sue's, but I went back to the garage, and Cecy brought Mary there. What do you think of his car, Clyde?"

"Oh, I suppose it's as good a way for him to waste money as any other! Haven't you been to Sue's at all?"

"Oh, no!" she answered, sincerely enough. But she felt ashamed of the subtly concealed untruths; often Rose felt truly that they were forced upon her by his utter unreasonableness, but she could not honestly so excuse herself to-night. She had done a risky and a questionable thing, of all men in the world Jack was the last with whom she should have taken this chance, and for the first time in their married life she had given Clyde genuine cause for anger and resentment.

But as the first fever of fear and fatigue and confusion died away, the memory of that happy hour came back, and Rose sat dreaming all evening over her book, a half-smile on her lips, and the treasures of Jack Tal-

bot's words and glances being taken out like jewels, and viewed and re-viewed, and jealously hidden away again.

She did not see him again until the following week; this was a gala week in light-hearted Gates Mill, for the State Convention of Bankers, and Admission Day, and Labour Day all came together, and the Napa Parlour of the Native Sons, the Shriners, the Knights, the Elks, decorated River Street from the bridge to Harrison Hill, turned out in full regalia and piled dinner upon dinner, and dance upon dance.

Among the dinners was naturally one given by old Rogers, of the Bank, to no less than twenty-eight guests. This was a great occasion; Edith had to lend her mother silver and glassware, and several of the younger women came in on the afternoon of the day itself, to help set the table, and arrange the flowers, and exclaim over the gargantuan proportions of the preparations kitchenward.

"My chicken Old Dominion," as the fat, plaintive-voiced mistress of the house always called it, had been simmering for days, and about it circled the lesser dishes, the rolls and the salad, the "fruit cup," that Edith had persuaded her parent was really more in fashion to begin the meal than even the "nutmegs," as they all called the cantaloupe.

"Seemed to me a while back that we never would get anything better than the melons!" protested the hostess, tasting hot liquid tomato jelly critically.

"I assure you she's right, Mother Rogers," said young Fred's wife. "Fruit cup—that's what they start with at all the hotels now!"

"Ede says nobody has chicken patties any more," her mother continued, plaintively.

"Oh, imagine—chicken patties!" Rose Bainbridge said, laughing, as she carefully matched napkins from a freshly laundered pile.

"We used always to have them, Rose! See if you'd put more onion in this," said Mrs. Rogers.

"I don't believe I would! Delicious! Now here are twenty-eight of the clovers, Amy," Rose said. "And I'm putting four more here on the side-table for emergencies. Sue, you're near that window, look out and see if Mary is in flames or being eaten by Tige, or anything!"

"You'll be the death of me, Rose!" Mrs. Rogers commented with a rueful laugh. "But I was always in fits about my children, too," she confessed.

"But there are half-a-dozen children out there, Mother; they'll watch each other!" Edith, who looked pale and seemed restless, argued impatiently.

"Well, you wait awhile, my dear, and you'll sing another song," her mother assured her, and the other women laughed.

They were established in the Rogerses' roomy pantry, with the swinging doors between kitchen and dining room propped open, so that there could be sociable coming and going. Great black olives were being poured from the gilt tin cans into cut-glass dishes, salted nuts were ready for their silver saucers, pink and white peppermints were ranged neatly on hand-painted plates. The two regular servants, and two more, were passing and repassing, seriously engaged with fundamentals, with sweeping and the dragging of chairs; a score of delicious odours mingled in the kitchen.

The women all exclaimed enthusiastically at each other's achievements and depreciated their own.

"Amy, those flowers are perfectly exquisite—yes, I would, I'd fluff them up even more. How nicely you've done those, Rose! Oh, m'yum, m'yum, look at the cakes! Oh, Sally, is that your angel cake? Seven cakes—they'll burst if they eat one tenth of this stuff!"

Rose was conscientiously arranging plates, coffee cups, glass saucers in the pantry, and trying to enter into the feeling of panic-stricken Mrs. Kitts, the chief supernumerary, when the full rush and confusion of the dinner should be upon her, when she suddenly found Jack beside her.

They smiled at each other; if they spoke the words were commonplace enough; it was sufficient for Rose to have him so near; her heart began its half-frightened half-ecstatic hammering again. Of what Jack felt, as he saw the rippled burned-gold of the downbent head, the sudden upward glimpse of the blue eyes, the slender, exquisite figure buttoned into a severely fresh linen apron, and the busy hands with their trim little cuffs pinned with tiny gold clasps, he gave no sign.

"This looks as if you could feed a regiment!"

"Doesn't it? We're having such fun! And how did the banquet go? Was Clyde's speech all right?"

"Fine. I never heard him make a better! Now they're all being driven about to see the Mills and the Iron Works and all that, you know," Jack said in his slow, pleasant voice, with a half-grin, "but it was my good luck to draw three ladies, and they all said they were worn out, and wanted to go to the hotel to lie down!"

"Taste that, Jack," said his mother-in-law, presenting a spoon at his lips with an upward reach of a plump arm, "I've got the girls all stale on tasting!"

"My good *Lord!*" Jack said, in simple, fervent admiration. "What is it?"

"It's my chicken Old Dominion," Mrs. Rogers said, pleased. "But I put in extra cream. The eggs and mushrooms and olives aren't in yet, either. I put twenty pullets in that!"

"Well, have enough—that's all I have to say to you!" he warned her.

"Jack, don't, or I'll be sick right here!" Amy pleaded. "She's got a wash-boiler of it, and three sandwich loaves of thin toast to go under it!"

The group drifted and changed, and in another minute Rose heard Jack say quietly, close to her ear:

"Any trouble, the other night?"

"No," she answered, thankfully, after a quick cautious glance about. "My car wasn't quite ready when I got to the garage. But what a scare, and how silly—how unnecessary, to feel that one mayn't do an innocent thing like that without feeling like a murderer!"

She raised her smiling eyes to him, and made a little childish face, at once rebellious, mischievous, and appealing, and all confiding and friendly.

And again their casual and irrelevant words seemed full of deep sweetness, and charged with a disquieting and inexplicable thrill. Rosalind, from that moment, dated the pervasive joy and the utter content that came into her life, and not again could she and Jack meet without extraordinary emotion, without a strange consciousness of each other's presence, a quiet meeting of eyes across crowded rooms, in the presence of other persons, it mattered not how or where.

The sight of the very spots where they had nodded, or stopped to speak, thrilled Rosalind now. She did not

analyze it; she dared not. She told herself that she asked no more than this, an occasional meeting, an occasional smile, perhaps an even rarer word now and then. It was enough that they were in the same town, that their lives must inevitably bring them together now and then.

On the night of the big dinner—a landmark in Mrs. Rogers's domestic career—he came across the big rooms to her, handsome and tall and lean, in his irreproachable evening dress, and stood behind her while she played a bridge hand.

"Jack, advise me! They're all sharks!" she smiled, looking up, and so beautiful in the spreading folds of her thin brown lace, that the three men who were playing with her laid down their hands, quite contented to look on. Jack saw the rise of her exquisite white breast, the play of colour in the lovely face where—he remembered! —there was just a hint of width between the eyes, and just a suggestion of length in the cheek bones.

"Go ahead!" he said, studying her hand attentively. "Oh, lead that, Rose!"

"That!" she echoed, in amazement.

"Certainly, keep the control. Make them come to you!"

He wandered away again, but the little touch of easy wisdom had thrilled her, and her face glowed for an hour with an unearthly beauty. When the general confusion of breaking-up came, Edith and Jack and Clyde all joined her.

"You got the prize?" Edith, who had been burningly aware of the fact for half-an-hour, said sweetly. Rose smilingly displayed the cut-glass olive bowl.

"It goes with my others," Rose said in satisfaction.

"Wouldn't you be proud if your stupid wife won prizes?" Edith, who played bridge badly, asked Jack, rubbing her cheek intimately against his sleeve as she stood beside him. "Kiss stupid wife!" she commanded him, pursing the hard little unfriendly lips, and raising her face to his. "You know when a person thinks that everything you do is perfect, Rose," Edith continued, prettily, "you don't feel much incentive to learn new things!"

"Let's have an evening of bridge, just we four," Jack suggested, expanding. His wife immediately took the breath from his body with a viciously sharp pinch on the inside of his left arm. "Anytime—we'll arrange it——" he added, vaguely, controlling with an actual effort an expression of pain.

"Like all good husbands," Clyde said, with a steel-cold smile and a glance at his wife, "I should have to consult Rose. My time is always at your disposal," he added, pressing upon her thin slipper with a merciless sharp pump.

"We'll arrange it," Rose agreed, blanching a little, but smiling her own sweet, unearthly smile.

Jack, seeing it, felt something turn and twist in his heart. And as Rose met his eyes, her own heart seemed suddenly to expand, to brim with a mysterious and a sweet emotion.

For a moment they stood looking at each other. And from that moment he was no longer Jack Talbot, the boy she had loved so casually and so happily in her youth; from that moment she was not to him just the usually fine, beautiful girl who might have been his wife.

In that little space, the miracle had been wrought. Their looks, their words, were freighted henceforth with

exquisite meaning and strange significance. Just to touch his hand, just to meet his glance, just to know that he was in the world was enough joy, now, to Rose. Her beauty bloomed anew for him, her eyes regained the old limpid, liquid light. Every telephone call, although he never telephoned, every street turning, although they rarely met, meant a possibility of Jack to her, and her life brimmed with a happiness that made it seem dreamlike and unreal; indeed, Rose lived in two worlds now: the real world and the world within her heart. They never exchanged a word that all the world might not have heard, yet the rediscovered friendship shone like a great light about them both, and Rose used to smile at herself, feeling that the least significant of the little things she did all day: the pulling of a weed, the pinning of a tiny dripping sweater in the sun, was somehow made the sweeter by her own mysterious envelopment in happy dreams.

She never spoke directly of her husband to Jack unless in answer to some inquiry about Clyde's health. Their opportunities to talk at all were few, and usually among the familiar voices of the group.

But he had a special look for her, and she felt it rather than knew it; he had special tones, and the stupidest dinner was wonderful to Rose if the Talbots were there. Even if Clyde were contrary, and flatly declined to go to some festivity, she could amuse herself for hours beside the fireplace ostensibly with her book, really lost in a hazy world of memories and of joy.

On an autumn night that was damp and filled with restless breezes she was hurrying home in the dusk when she chanced to see the sitting-room window of the old Talbot mansion, with a flood of light pouring

out, and Jack's figure silhouetted there for the minute before he drew down the shade upon the cosiness and warmth within. And that evening Rose had a vague, bewildering heartache; she could not get her happy memories in line, the renewed friendship, despite its thrilling touch of secrecy and its wordless understanding, did not seem enough, to-night. Her thoughts went achingly to the sitting room she had glimpsed as she came by; she mused of companionship, of sympathy, of a fire, a book, and a mood exquisitely shared.

It was one of Clyde's silent evenings, when his brow, for no discernible reason, was a thunder cloud, when he looked resentfully at her, ignored her every remark, ate his dinner in sombre pauses between vitriolic criticisms of her appearance, her management, the dinner itself.

"But, Clyde, are you angry at me?"

"What makes you think I am angry at any one, Rose, or are you simply speaking to hear yourself talk?" he asked, in freezing resentment.

Silence. Silence. Then suddenly:

"Where did you bump the mud-guard?"

She stared at him.

"I didn't know it was bumped!"

"Yes, you knew it was bumped, because you were driving it."

"Perhaps I was parked somewhere," Rose submitted.

"No, it wasn't when you were parked! Unless you were parked where you shouldn't have been!"

There was no end to this sort of rambling, chronic complaint, even a complete silence on her part would not satisfy him.

"Take the car in to Roper to-morrow, and ask him to smooth out the guard, and tell him exactly how it hap-

pened!" Clyde finally said, carrying the coffeepot and his cup into the room in which he worked in the evenings, and shutting the door.

Rose took a little pongee frock, ready for smocking, and sat down in the chair beside the dining room's air-tight stove. It was warm in here, but the sitting room would be cold. Clyde objected to having four fires going so early in the year. Next month they would have five or even six fires, for there was no furnace in the house, and the heavy surrounding shrubbery closed out the winter daylight at four o'clock and made the whole place chilly and dark.

The clock struck half-past seven.

"Jack, love is a great thing," she said to him conversationally, a few afternoons later. "But isn't companionship—sympathy—the most wonderful thing in the whole world? I look back to Cecy and me—well, for instance, we went down once and spent three days in San Francisco with the Lawrences. I'll never forget that boat trip—we had our dinner on the boat, and we kept rushing to the stateroom to see that nobody had stolen our suitcase, and how we laughed! Then do you remember——"

The colour came into her face, and she looked at him oddly.

"Go on!" he said, quietly, with a nod.

"Well, I was going to say, do you remember those idiotic trips of ours down River Street—the day we bought things in the second-hand store—and those frightfully hot nights when we used to row on the river and sing? And do you remember the day when we were driving and met the Swedish family whose Ford had

broken down, and helped them to move on to that pathetic little farm?"

They were alone for a moment in the office; Clyde had been called to the telephone; there was five-o'clock twilight in the room.

"I remember it all; I've thought of it passing that farm more than once!" Jack said, in a low tone, marking the blotter before him with hard little dots and commas.

"Was it just because we were young, Jack, or was it really—awfully"—she laughed over the youthful word —"awfully sweet?" she finished.

"No, it wasn't just being young; it was the sweetest thing in the world!" he said, suddenly, looking up with a brief smile, and looking down at the blotter he was marring again. "I'd rather play around River Street on a summer night——" he began, and stopped. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, wouldn't you!" she echoed, wistfully. "What *is* it—what is it," she broke out in honest bewilderment, "that makes the silliest—the littlest—things with certain people so happy to remember?"

"I think I know," Jack answered, after a space.

"I hope you are not going to say love, for I don't think it has anything to do with it!" Rose said, sensibly, smiling at him gallantly, although she was quaking within.

"No, I don't think I was going to say that, Rose," Jack said, quietly, with a long sigh.

"Well, what, then?" She knew she should not ask it, but something stronger than herself had carried her feet from the ground like a tide, and she was lifted free of earth, and moving rapidly—rapidly—she knew not where.

"I suppose the things you are, my dear," he answered, presently, trying to speak sensibly in his turn. "Goodness—sweetness—interest in other people's affairs—unselfishness about your own. You make me think of what we all must be, to discover the Kingdom, you know—just all simpleness and kindness and happiness, and love for everybody and everything!"

There was a long silence in the office, while twilight darkened to dusk in the yard, and the whistles blew, and the shapes of chairs and desks and filing cabinets disappeared into soft gloom.

Then Rose touched a light and went slowly to the window, and stood, slender, silent, staring out into the early darkness, the furred collar of her long coat high about her face, the little hat with its down-curling soft feather almost meeting the fur.

Jack got up, and followed her there, and said briefly and without emotion:

"You know what I think of you, now—I've always thought so, and I want you to know it. It may help you over something hard, some day, Rose, to know that to me you are wonderful—the woman who stands for everything good and lovely in this life! I'm not going to talk like a—like a second act, Rose. But I threw away Paradise—and there isn't an hour of my life that I don't realize it! I hope I can always love you without hurting you. I hope you and I may have the most wonderful friendship that a man and woman ever had, and harm nobody. I'm not fit for it, but I need it—I need it more than you will ever know. You've always been square—I haven't; but you said you forgave me, and perhaps some day—after all, I'm a rich man!—perhaps some day I'll have a chance to do something for you—

to show you that your own father couldn't love you and respect you more than I do—couldn't be half so glad as I would be to die for you, Rose of the World!"

She did not answer immediately; she stood with her head a little drooped, and one white hand, ringed by the fur cuff, slowly turning and turning the tassel of the window shade.

It was fifteen minutes later that she answered him; it was after Clyde had returned and the Bainbridges had gone out to the gushes of harsh light that marked the parked cars in the sooty gloom of the yard. Jack went with them to the cars, he saw that she was flushed; and in the unromantic glare her eyes blinked mistily like a sleepy baby's. Then, for the fraction of a second—and for many an hour afterward!—he felt the light soft touch of her ungloved hand upon his bare one, the little old confidential pressure of her warm fingers.

He heard her familiar, "Oh, I'm sorry, Clyde!" as with a furious jerking and wrenching her husband started the car, and they disappeared into the darkness

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY were hardly French lessons that she had with old Miss Cartier now, in the stuffy little cottage in Bender Street, for Rose had, it appeared, a natural aptitude for languages, and in the long five years had come to chatter in the adopted tongue almost as readily as in her own.

But the mere fact of faithfully keeping to her hour on Tuesday and on Friday mornings meant that she did not lose ground, and Rose knew, too, and was touched to know, that the fifty cents she paid for each lesson bulked large in the frail little old spinster's budget. Marie Lucie Cartier owned the tumbledown little place, and Rose gathered that she lived upon the chocolate she milled deliciously in a small china chocolate pot, and the crusty hot loaf of French bread she brought home daily from Madame Charpontier's little bakery as a largesse for the kindly watching of the Charpontier babies while their perspiring and industrious parents went over to the *Crillon, pension bourgeoise* for the one hearty meal of their hard day.

The room in which the pleasant reading, and much incidental chatter, went on, hung perilously over the river, and was decorated without by much perforated millwork and lighted within by a shaky window that reached from the low papered ceiling to the uneven floor. It was cluttered with small velvet articles, lace doilies, tipsy lamps, Berlin wool work, shells, heavy gift

books in old brown stamped leather and gold lettering, fussy little walnut chairs, footstools and hassocks, little china figurines, newspapers treasured in embroidered newspaper racks, trembling grasses and teazles in vases, crocheted comforters composed of endless little square designs, crooked pictures in small cork-spattered or cut-wood frames, and photographs so dimmed and faded to so pale a brown, that only the loyal eyes of their owner could distinguish one from another.

How any one, building a room at all, could possibly build it so low-ceiled and so crooked, Rose used to wonder. It was always dim and shaded and close, and heavily scented with some perfume like musk, and with some dry powdery substance like snuff. Narrowing her eyes the better to concentrate upon her verbs, she would find herself frivolously speculating as to Miss Cartier's appearance in her night wear, and as to which of these slippery, serpentine little sofas was her bed.

There were perhaps five hundred old books packed away in the darker corners, books in rusty black and green bindings, "very valuable. Some day I shall sell them, for they belonged to my dear brother, who was very sage!" said their old owner sometimes in great pride. She never opened the English books, but with them were a few scattered French volumes: "Le Recit d'une Sœur" and "La Vie de Mère Julie Billiart," and these she occasionally weeded out and loaned to Rose.

Upon a sparkling, sunshiny morning just before Thanksgiving, Rose and little Mary made their way into Bender Street for the usual Tuesday *causerie*. There had been a howling windstorm the night before, and Rose had had a restless night. But this morning was glorious, with a high sweet breeze moving far above

the tree-tops and shepherding fleecy clouds toward the south, and with pools in the lanes strewn with the last leaves and reflecting the clear, thin blue of the high-arched sky. Everything snapped, shone, twinkled, and fluttered this morning, and Rose smiled as she walked down River Street at a pace that accommodated little interested Mary, and noted the tiny turkeys in Crosset's window, between the slim, beribboned boxes of candy and the real turkeys hanging limp and waxen in all the bright stir and colour of the markets.

After infinite discussion it had been arranged that since Clyde had to be in the office all Thursday morning, and since Mom always had her turkey dinner at one o'clock, and since the Bainbridges would not have theirs until night, Rose and Mary were to spend Thanksgiving Day at Grandma's house. Rose had sent out the eighteen-pound turkey yesterday, and the cranberries and the celery; she knew that her mother and Audrey and perhaps the little Weed girls were already busy with apples and nuts and raisins and suet. Ned, big and grinning, had reached Gates Mill on Saturday night.

The world seemed friendly, gay, delightful, to Rose to-day, and it was with a sudden revulsion of mood that she discovered that her little teacher was in some distress. The windmill back of Parrott's Stables had blown down last night, and deluged the rear of the forlorn little cottage in which Miss Cartier lived.

"She pour directly down over the boxes where I have stored the old hats and dresses," exclaimed Mademoiselle in despair, "and my poor books!"

Futile and ineffectual in everything she did, she had pulled out a bandbox here, a sheaf of old magazines there, she had laid a few books on the kitchen table

among cups and salt-shakers, and was now lamenting aloud as she knelt in the inundated corner, feebly mopping at the ruins with a bundled old blue linen skirt.

Not knowing whether to laugh or to cry, Rose turned up her cuffs, pinned on an apron, and plunged gallantly into the confusion, stacking, shaking, wiping with a will.

"John Parrott will make this up to you!" she said, working busily.

"Indeed he has been here already!" the Frenchwoman answered, appreciatively. "What it shall cost me, that he shall pay! 'But it is my window that has fault, Monsieur!' I cry. 'I pay,' he answers me. Behold, Rose," she added, "the garden seeds here in an envelope! And advise me, my child, should I make this good man pay me two dollars?"

"Twenty!" Rose assured her, sitting comfortably upon her heels and wiping soaked bindings with the tender touch of the booklover. Miss Cartier regarded her, eyes wide with awe. Rose heard her whisper, "Twenty—but no!" under her breath.

Mary, rapturously wandering amid the confusion, now approached her mother with a tentative:

"Water not in *my* house?"

Rose stopped to snatch her, kiss her, set her ruffled and breathless upon her little feet again. Then she picked up a heavy tome that bore only an irregular circle of water-stain upon its loosening brown cover.

A volume of the Encyclopædia Britannica. "Cod-Dem." She held it in her hands a minute, a look of puzzled thought upon her face. Then her eyes brightened.

"Miss Cartier!" she exclaimed, excitedly. "Do you

know what this is? It's the missing volume of my grandfather's Encyclopædia that my mother gave the Public Library, years and years ago! We always thought it had been destroyed in the River Street fire when my grandfather's offices were burned, before his accident. But fancy—" cried Rose, her eyes shining like stars—"fancy finding it here, after all these years!"

"But, my dear child, how wrong I have been! No, it was not stealing," her hostess said, anxiously, "but to have him hidden so long! Shall I send him to your good grandfather——"

"Grandfather wouldn't know the difference," Rose assured her, smiling kindly, and a little sadly, thinking that if it had been Grandpa's, it was a sane man's hand that had last touched the old book. "But how do you suppose it ever got here?"

"It was my brother, no doubt, it was Adrian," the old lady said, nodding a crimped and puffed and grizzled head. "He was very sage, he was a notary. But also he made beautiful—— But wait!"

She crossed the room to an indescribably decrepit secretaire, and brought to Rose, who was still sitting on the floor, thoughtfully fingering the yellowed, cramped pages of the old book, a portfolio full of old blue-print drawings.

"I see!" Rose, who had heard and seen all this before, answered, admiringly. And instantly, with a flash of strange inner seeing, it was all clear. The lost volume, the design for the "Centipede," the assistance of this young French draughtsman, the contract mislaid, the fire in River Street, the accident that had robbed her magnificent giant of a grandfather of his reason——

She turned the pages of the Encyclopædia quietly, con-

fidently feeling that she had heard and felt and done all this before. And the slim, yellowed envelope was in her hands.

There it was, intact after thirty-five long years in prison. It was an old-fashioned envelope, long, and with "Talbot and Tallifer Gates Mill Iron Works," stamped crookedly in blue in its upper left-hand corner.

Outside the singing autumn day shone over the town. In the kitchen sunshine little Mary chattered and laughed to herself. And here in the little, cluttered, stuffy room that was strewn with water-stained articles, the busy little piping voice of old Miss Cartier rambled on and on.

Rose sat still, feeling herself dazed and shocked, in a changed world. There seemed to be a high, bewildering humming noise in her ears, she blinked her eyes, felt her heart beat lightly and rapidly in her breast.

After awhile, but with neither doubt nor curiosity, she opened the ungummed flap, and looked at the single folded sheet of paper within. Old-fashioned brown ink, and an old-fashioned strong handwriting that Rose, as one of his long-ago employees, instantly recognized as that of the senior Talbot himself. Bewildering talk of per cents and agreements, and two signatures: "Josiah Wittinger Talbot" strong and sprawling, and the fine old familiar "Nathaniel Tallifer" that filled her eyes with sudden tears of love and pain.

Dear old Grandpa, wandering sweet and half-witted and gentle through the whole long third of a century—through more than that!—unable to give the daughter he adored, and the grandchildren who had known want and deprivation, and restlessness and rebellion and

tears, the comfort and the position that lay waiting here in this little envelope!

Rose visualized the strangely complicated story: the two young men, children of pioneers, and friends from the days of flowing side-chops and strapped trousers and checked vests, entering into an agreement regarding the invention one of them had just completed. Si Talbot had the few necessary hundreds to purchase a little ground, a small forge. Nat Tallifer had the brain and the drawing that meant the birth of the famous "Centipede," the little farm tractor that had proved the foundation of the Talbot fortune. They had called in the draughtsman, to make their plans secure, and they had opened the old Encyclopædia at "Contracts."

Then what? Adrian Cartier, perhaps, had carried the Encyclopædia home from Nat Tallifer's office—or perhaps the paper had been quite accidentally enclosed within, and it was to draw a fresh contract that the old volume had been needed.

However that may have been, the betraying date upon this discoloured old paper was just a month before the fatal morning of the runaway, now forty years ago, when Grandpa Tallifer and Si Talbot had driven forth behind the famous Talbot stallion, a drive from which one man returned untouched in body but irrevocably harmed in mind, and after which the other limped all his life long.

And after that? Well, there had been months in which they had all hoped that Grandpa, a giant in body, would be cured. There must have been months when J. Wittinger Talbot's—he was beginning to be J. Wittinger then—when his one thought must have been that Tallifer would presently return to take his

share in the Iron Works, and the profits therefrom. And meanwhile the Encyclopædia had been carried away from the set, and stowed here in this obscure corner under the tasselled fringes and crowded tables.

Grandpa had not recovered his mind; Talbot must have come slowly to realize that he never would. Steadily pushing on with the interests of his growing business, Talbot had lived with the sword over his head, had married, prospered, grown rich. He had patented the "Centipede" seven months after the accident, and the first imposing business letterhead of the Iron Works had made no mention of his partner.

Rose had often heard her mother complacently state that years ago Grandpa had been in business with old Talbot himself. There was nothing incomprehensible to her in the fact that one old man had died a millionaire and the other was almost a beggar.

The state was full of such paradoxes; fortunes had been for any man's taking sixty years ago. Every frail old wreck in the Home for the Aged could tell of having "mined with Crocker," "been Hopkins' side-partner," or "worked with Stanford" years ago. They were only failures by chance.

But Grandpa had not been a failure. A share at least of the Talbot wealth should have been his, and his one of the handsome old mansions of Upper River Street. And Rose and Cecy should have been among the village girls who went to Fallen Leaf Lake in the summer, who played tennis on those rose-fenced courts, who were "finished" in New York schools.

Mamma could buy the old, long-deserted Pierce house now, just opposite Rose in Santa Clara Street. Cecy could have the prettiest trousseau Gates Mill had ever

seen. Audrey—no, they couldn't send dancing little loving Audrey away to school. But Ned——!

Here Rose's thoughts halted a little, too. Ned was so nice and strong and sensible at nineteen that there seemed small object in spoiling him with an allowance and a car. However, after working his way through more than a year of college, and after having earned money in garages, and plumbers' and electricians' shops, since his eleventh year, Ned was unlikely to spoil now.

"It hasn't been bad for us!" Rose thought, in all simple gratitude and pleasure. "But, oh, how wonderful it's going to be!"

And she was just child enough to stop at Prosser's, walking home with the precious paper safe in her pocketbook, to price the beautiful wheat-gold paper unrolled in the window.

"That there one there is a real expensive paper, Mis' Bainbridge," said Prosser himself. "D'ye mean this here one here, or that there one there? That there one is three dollars the roll. George, is this here yellow paper priced hung?"

"No, sir," the unseen George responded, enthusiastically.

"That ain't for hanging, neither," Prosser, who knew nothing of his business, paring a thick thumb nail, assured Rose, as if she might not have grasped George's negative.

Rose went upon her radiant way. Mom could have it, three dollars or thirty a roll, if she wanted it! Rose was mentally cleaning out the old Pierce house, papering it, painting it, letting in the sunlight, laying rugs, cutting the rope and burlap from new bureaus and chairs.

Mom and Ned and Grandpa and Audrey would be

right across the street, Cecy and Bozzy probably in the neighbourhood. It was all too thrilling and wonderful even to think about, and Rose laughed aloud once or twice, stooping immediately afterward to kiss the upturned, puzzled face of little Mary.

She felt a faint guilty pang when she remembered she had known for almost two hours this discovery that would be supremely interesting to Clyde, who had been examining her mother and grandfather, who had been ransacking old papers and trunks in the hope of finding it, for years. Clyde would take a bitter satisfaction in punishing the Talbots for their long years of arrogant superiority in pushing his advantage over them to the last penny. Rose thought of Edith's emotions upon learning that the despised Kirbys were at least on something like a footing with herself, and was ashamed of her own secret pleasure in the thought. A big account in the Rogerses' Bank—the whole town talking about them—ah, one week of such reëstablishment would wipe out a whole lifetime of privation and wrongs!

No use telephoning Clyde, he would resent interruption so violently that by the time he grasped her message Ruth Josephs, on the telephone board, would be an interested listener. Rose hesitated. She might ask him to come home at once? But he would be ugly about it.

She satisfied her conscience by telephoning Ruth Josephs, and asking for Clyde. Mr. Bainbridge was in a conference, it appeared, and would call Mrs. Bainbridge as soon as he was free.

So now there was nothing to do but dream, for Rose dared not confide this matter even to her mother until she had discussed it with Clyde. She and Mary carried

their luncheon into the backyard as they loved to do on clear days, scattering the crumbs from their little red tablecloth to the birds that chirped and whistled in the thick, woody membranes of the ivy above the cliff.

While Mary played Rose stood leaning on the fence, looking down into busy State Street below, and feeling, with a sense of awe and solemnity, that the world was literally at her feet.

She had won it all, in these short six years since she and Jack had loved and laughed, since he had left her, frozen into bitter silence, after her bitter words, with that last threat ringing upon the silent, warm afternoon air: "You'll be sorry! I'll live to hurt you as you've hurt me!"

Well, she had lived to conquer. She had won her way into the respect, and then the liking, and then the lives, of that long and wistfully admired Upper River Street Set. It was "Rose" and "Juliet" and "Edith," now, and when they spoke of music she understood them, and her knowledge of books, of French, of history, was far better than theirs.

These were all victories, hardly fought. But now had come others upon their heels, so smoothly, so swiftly, that Rose could only stand amazed. It was not only that Clyde was an actual stockholder in the Talbot business, but here was Cecy about to marry into their very holy of holies, Cecy, whom Rose's example, and advice, and help had turned from a rowdyish little village belle into as fine a gentlewoman as any of them.

And now finally—this. This yellowed paper that meant that the Kirbys were placed once and for all among the first families of Gates Mill.

Perhaps it had never been very high, her ambition to win the Rogerses, the Terrys, the Pearsalls, and the Raymonds. Perhaps—she mused, dreaming in the balmy afternoon sunshine of the Western winter, it might be different if she had her life for the last few years to live again in the light of all she knew and felt now. But, after all, this was Rose's world. She had been snubbed, had smarted under the yoke of the shabby genteel so long!

Life had been very kind to her. There was something infinitely satisfying to her youthful romanticism in the definite fashion by which this final stroke of fortune was to be achieved. Despised, poor, shabby little Rose Kirby who had entered the fight so courageously——

A little cloud came over her blue eyes, and she faintly knit her level brows. She had come, in her thoughts, to Clyde, and she forgot everything else for a few moments in sombre wonderment at herself for ever having married him.

To be able to revive just one of the old motives! To see him just for a second as she had seen him then!

It was no use. Whatever he had been to her five years ago had long ago been blotted from her memory by what he had become now: the cold, stern, crushing personality that dominated every act and word and thought of her caged life.

Had she thought him handsome? Well, people were apt to tell her that they did so still. Had it been the impressive thirty-four years opposed to her twenty-two? Had it been his position—his manner?

Rose knew now that it had been a costly mistake. She did not rage or complain; she took not even her

mother into her confidence. What the family saw might influence them, but they had scant supplementary information from Rose. She had chosen, and silently, courageously, patiently, she abided by her choice.

But the thought came to her suddenly now, and with it a great wave of pain and disillusionment, that to go back to Old Mill Lane to-night and help Mom and Cecy with dinner, to laugh with Ned, and to straighten the shabby old sitting room so that "the crowd" might come in to sing songs, and talk, and laugh, and make chocolate and toast, she would have destroyed this paper in her handbag, these few scrawled lines that fulfilled the last of all her old, idle dreams.

For all this, this dining with the Terrys, this buying a hat at "Yvonne's," and having charge accounts at Hellman's and Bond & Howard's was Dead-Sea fruit, after all. What of it? Suppose she could walk in and call pleasantly upon Mayor Rudolph's wife, suppose she did have more than one "best dress"? Were these things comparable to the old state of mind, the old radiant health and the laughter, the confidence that everyone liked her, everyone was her friend?

She had longed to live in Upper River Street, yes. But was it fair to find that hope realized in the oppressive, smothering environment of Clyde Bainbridge's house, to have youth and gaiety, spontaneous speech, confidences, the very nature and essence of herself, being slowly strangled there?

It was all so hard to understand, so hard to analyze. She was a woman now, sensitive, dependent, timid, bound by a thousand newly discovered cords of her heart to the precious responsibility of her child. Whoever

had any authority over Mary held Rose prisoner; Mary must not be punished for what she had done; Mary must not be frightened.

And like half the women of the world, she ended her reverie with wet eyes, and with the heartsick realization that she had learned too late. Wifehood had taught her, motherhood had taught her. Now she had wealth, position, everything—and it was too late to go back and begin all over again, and this time win somehow to the realer things.

She took Mary into the house, presently, and still in a queer dream began to construct little houses of Mary's stone bricks that interested her far more than the child.

"No, let Mother finish it, Sweetie, as it is on the paper! See, with the little tower——?"

Mary would crash them joyfully, shouting, "Break!"

"Yes, but don't break them until I finish them! And don't fall off the table, Sweetest." And Rose, putting the blocks away in their places according to the cunningly planned design, reflected sagely that all little human houses broke—just before one finished them! "So that it isn't getting the money, the power, the fame, that is really smart," she mused, "it's discovering, in time, that they aren't worth getting!" And later she said half-aloud, and softly: "I wish—I wish I had never told Jack I would be even! But then, I wish I hadn't done so many things!"

At about four o'clock her grandfather came in. Rose's very smile of welcome was tinged with a secret hope that Clyde would be late to-night, and Grandpa safely gone before he came home. To find any one with her in the late afternoon was always annoying to Clyde, even if he had not especially disliked this mild, magnifi-

cent, silver-maned, harmless old man. Time the old man was dead, Clyde thought.

For Rose's grandfather was eighty, standing four inches over six feet, with frosty blue eyes, and a splendid milky beard that flowed over his breast in patriarchal glory. For more than thirty years his brain had been subtly, faintly twisted, made useless, harmless. He was always gentle, or almost always so; he loved children, loved to garden, and to wander off upon the long rambles that took him into nearly every dooryard or crossroads store in the neighbourhood in the course of every ten days or so, and made the loneliest of little farm wives, isolated in the foothills, his friends. He frequently sang as he went along, and they would pause in the bright blowing spring sunshine, with the dangling little damp baby clothes and the clothes pins held suspended in their toil-worn hands, to smile as they heard him and to say, eagerly, "There's Gramp!"

Rose was his idol, she had been the centre of his world since her radiant, sunny-headed babyhood. In return she made him father, guide, philosopher, and friend, turned to him in her troubles, talked to him the more freely because he could neither remember nor understand, and cried out many a youthful hurt with her soft cheek pressed against the silver beard and the giant arms held tight about her.

To-night, as he came in from the restless flying airs of the wild, rough afternoon, she gave him a kiss in which all maternal love and pity were blended. Gramp, whose signature upon that scrap of paper upstairs was to mean so much new happiness in all their lives, and who might not even be thanked!

Rose took her rocker and her sewing, and settled

herself contentedly at the northwest window; Mary kissed the visitor tentatively, flitted away, and was lured by her own microscopic coquetry back into his neighbourhood.

He sat panting, glowing, smiling, his shock of hair blown into disorder by the winds; he never wore either hat or wrap, and seemed superbly beyond the reach of even the wildest elements. He told Rose about an incubator he had just seen, about the Clyson's ducks, and the old Swedish woman who had killed herself, and the bobcat that had come into Bowdish's yard.

And then, as the uneasy twilight came, and while it seemed still too early for the lamp, he and Rose and the child stayed on at the window, looking straight down over the fall of the cliff into the old quarry, and State Street, and the town. There was a two-foot stretch of garden bed just under the window, and then came the ivy-shrouded great braces above the quarry.

To-night the wind was tossing the dark ivy leaves roughly, and the stiff stalks of the half-dead heliotrope rattled stiffly in the grip of furious brief blasts of air.

Far below, well-wrapped women drove their bodies against the winds of State Street, staggered into bakery and grocery. Belated school children went by in a group, shouting and pushing each other, and motor cars worked their way through the trucks and fruit wagons that lined the curb.

CHAPTER XXVII

Rose and her grandfather jumped guiltily and Mary awakened from a half-doze at the sudden sound of Clyde's step. It was full dark now, and the room was filled with shadows.

A noisy whirl of air came in with Clyde, and he briskly and angrily entered the sitting room as Rose was hastily lighting the gas.

"What's the idea of leaving the front hall dark?" he demanded, shortly, in the critical, authoritative tone Rose dreaded.

"Didn't Datchi light the gas? Why, but Clyde," Rose began, defensively, "it's only just five. He never lights it until half-past."

"I know that perfectly well," Clyde answered, annoyed at the mere hint that he could have overlooked the fact. "But am I, with all I have to do, supposed to telephone you from the office when a particularly dark day comes along? Really, Rose, you do seem extraordinarily dull or inconsiderate—I don't know what it is, sometimes. I beg your pardon——"

The last, with icy emphasis, was addressed to the old man, under whose feet Clyde now straightened the end of a rug, his jaw set, his face florid with dark colour as he did so.

"What have you been doing in here?" he asked, patiently. "What's the occasion for everything being at sixes and sevens?"

"You have a headache!" Rose said, by way of answer, and in her most sympathetic tone.

"It's enough to give any one a headache to come home to a pig-pen like this!" he said, bitterly. "Sewing, toys—my God, it's disgusting! I put up with a good deal in my house, but when it comes to having every half-witted, insane——"

"Aren't you truly going to need an overcoat, dear?" Rose, into whose exquisite face the hot colour had suddenly risen, asked her grandfather affectionately. Sheer anger brought a sudden tremble to her lips and a bright film of tears to her eyes. She was breathing nervously; of all his ungraciousness, Clyde's to her grandfather hurt her most. If Grandpa would only go——

"You couldn't come back with me, Rose, and have dinner with your sister and mother?" he asked, delaying comfortably.

"Not to-night, darling."

"Rose, I really must ask to speak to you alone——" Clyde began, sternly and unsympathetically watching their farewells.

"Just a moment, dear! Love to Mom, Grandpa——"

"That reminds me that Cecy telephoned this morning, and said that Audrey had had a toothache, and that your mother didn't feel well and wanted to see you," Clyde told her. "She said your telephone was evidently out of order. I meant to telephone you——"

"Mom?" Her face was pale now, and she stood looking from one man to the other. "I could have gone out there!" she said, regretful and stirred. "I wish I had known! I wish I had known!"

"I have something else to do than retail messages from your family," Clyde reminded her, coldly.

"Yes, I know, of course!" But she was badly shaken. The emotional strain of the long gloomy day was beginning to tell, and to her horror she felt the quick free tears beginning to press against her eyes and thicken in her throat.

"Good-night, Grandpa dear!" she said, a little thickly, but with a gallant smile.

The old man looked in puzzlement from her face to Clyde's, looked back again.

"Why, you're crying, Rose!" he said, gently, infinite childish distress and bewilderment upon his ruddy old face. "You've made her cry," he said to Clyde, in a deep tone that frightened Rose. His own breath began to come rather short, and there was a stormy gleam in his bright blue eyes. "Did he hurt you, Rose?" he asked.

"No, no, no, dear!" she soothed him, hastily, only anxious that she and Clyde should be left alone.

"Don't you make her cry!" said the old man to Clyde, in a measured, unnatural tone, and with a strange look. Something in his manner seemed to hold Clyde transfixed, where he stood, and he made no reply. But Rose guided her magnificent old kinsman to the door. "Don't cry, Rosalind," he urged her then, pitifully.

"Indeed I won't Grandpa!" But she felt herself near to a devastating deluge of tears as she spoke. "Sure you won't be cold?"

"I don't like him!" her grandfather said, in the half-sly, half-innocent fashion of the weak-witted, and with a resentful glance at Clyde; "he's a hard man!"

"Good-night, dear!" The front door had opened upon a harsh cold rush of air, and was closed again. "Don't be angry at Grandpa, Clyde," Rose said, wearily

then, in the cool, gas-lighted ugliness of the hall. "You know he's not responsible for what he says."

"Now, look here, Rose," Clyde said, harshly, yet with a dreadful composure, "I mean this. I never want to see that man inside my house or grounds again! I never want to speak to him again. If I ever see him here, I'll have him kicked out, as I have a right to do. Do you hear me? Do you understand me? Never let him set foot here again. I'm done with your cracked-brained family!"

She had turned white and was watching him with wide, attentive eyes.

"Very well Clyde." Her heart was lead. She seemed frozen where she stood.

"And hereafter please see to that hall light yourself. will you, Rose?"

"Very well." There was silence, silence, while he hung up his hat and struggled out of his coat.

"Let me help you?" she said, coming nearer.

"Let me alone!" he answered, ungraciously. "You have the house as dark as a cave, and you're too busy to keep an eye on that idiot Jap, and then you want to 'help me'! Leave that alone, Mary," he added, savagely, as the little girl approached the package he had brought.

"What is it?" Rose asked, assuming a cheerful interest.

"Something I wanted," he said, briefly, putting it on the hat rack before he started upstairs. She watched him for a moment or two, and then went back into the sitting room again.

But in a few seconds he shouted loudly for her, and she ran upstairs.

"My God, Rose, you are hard to understand sometimes!" she heard him say, rummaging in his closet.

This always meant that she must ask him why, but she often evaded it, as now, with a mild:

"What's gone wrong now, dear?"

"Nothing's gone wrong except that you are absolutely the least efficient, the most pitiable excuse for a housekeeper that I ever saw," he answered, quickly. "I come home with my head splitting—you don't know what sympathy is—you're devoid of it! Except," Clyde continued, viciously, now pulling off his boots, "except when Mrs. Terry or Amy Pearsall asks you about me, and then it's all 'poor Mr. Bainbridge—how he does suffer—doesn't it seem terrible?' I wish to God that they could see you once at home, standing around saying: 'Oh, you've got a headache—dear me, isn't that nice—' yah, yah, yah!" Clyde sneered, in a bitter falsetto.

A baby wail now floated upstairs, bearing the words in little Mary's frightened voice:

"Oh, Mommy! I've breaked it!"

Husband and wife listened with intent faces, for a second or two of utter silence, and then Clyde said deliberately, with a darkening face:

"If she's broken that lampshade that I had to send to San Francisco for, she's going to get a whipping that she'll never forget!"

Rosalind's heart stood still, plunged, stopped again, and she tasted salt water in her mouth.

"Clyde, you mustn't punish her!" she said, quickly, in a light, half-frightened, half-warning voice. "She's only a baby."

"She's baby enough to obey," he said, with a terrible

sort of grimness, and as he completed his dressing, put on his velvet house coat.

"Clyde, you've got a headache, dear, and you're tired; let me handle her!" Rose said, breathing fast. "I'll put her right to bed and tell her that she's to have no marshmallow for disobeying her father—*please*, Clyde, don't frighten her! Please!"

She had put herself between him and the door, he flung her aside with rough fingers that bit into her arm, and went past her, and downstairs.

Rose, giddy and sick, leaned against the wall for a whirling second, and then flew after him.

Mary was crying at the foot of the stairs, Datchi had come out, and was gathering up broken green glass; the baby's tiny finger was bloody.

"Baby crying!" she sobbed, holding up her small arms to her mother.

Clyde caught her with a fury that made her scream

"Yes, and you're going to have something to cry for!" he said, gritting his teeth. But Rosalind was with them now, and she arrested him in the hall, her eyes blazing, her breast heaving, her face white.

"Listen, Clyde," she said, above Mary's wild crying, her hands against his chest, where Mary was squirming and struggling. "Listen to me. I've found it—the paper old Talbot signed—the contract about the 'Centipede'! I found it to-day. But I swear to God I'll burn it—I'll never give it to you—I've hidden it!—if you touch Mary. She's only a baby and I'll punish her! I'll slap her fingers and put her to bed, but you're not going to hurt her! Clyde, you're not listening—but I've found that paper—I swear I have——"

He was breathing hard, too, biting his under lip; she

saw comprehension come slowly into his furious eyes. He automatically put the child down.

"You're lying," he said, quietly, his eyes never leaving his wife.

"I'm not lying. I discovered it in an old book—at Miss Cartier's—this morning."

"Let me see it!" Clyde said, in a measured voice.

"Sit there—by the fire——" she began, struggling painfully with her heaving breast. "Let me put the baby to bed, and I'll bring it down to you! I—I can't —now."

"Bring it to me now," he said, slowly.

"No," Rose answered, feeling that she was going to faint or burst into tears. "Do it—my way."

He was sitting down, looking at her, panting still.

"How do you know it's the contract?"

"I don't. But I think it is."

"What's the percentage?"

"I don't know. I didn't read it, much. But they both signed it. It's five—or fifteen, I think."

"So you found it, eh?" he said, in a musing voice, with something like his old quiet smile, as he looked down thoughtfully at the floor. "We have them where we want them now, Rose!" he said.

She was trembling, her heart was shaken within her. She picked up the baby, upon whose wondering little face the big tears were drying, and went into the kitchen for toast and milk. To Mary's small ablutions, her vague little prayers, she faithfully attended. Then she picked the old envelope out of the Bible to which she had confided it for safe keeping and went slowly downstairs.

Clyde studied it with passionate attention, and she

saw an unfamiliar light in his eyes, and heard an exultant, friendly tone quite strange to her in his voice when he said:

"Yes. This is it. We've got them, now!"

"*Fifty* per cent., is it?" she asked, impressed, as she read it over his shoulder. "Dinner, dear," she added.

"Fifty it is," he said, in an odd tone.

"Clyde, that doesn't mean that half the business is ours?"

"That's exactly what it means. They arranged this on a fifty-fifty basis. I don't know who Adrian Cartier is, but old Renfrew, the other witness, is probably the old janitor I fired a few months ago——"

"Adrian Cartier was Miss Cartier's brother. He's been dead twenty years," Rose said, serving soup, and actually basking in this mood of normality upon Clyde's part. "But wouldn't a man like old Renfrew remember having witnessed it and have talked about it to someone?" she asked.

"Not necessarily—just called in to scrawl his name. I've witnessed a good many papers in my day."

"But, Clyde, we'll be really rich! And do you know I was thinking that we could buy Mom the old Pierce place—wouldn't that be ideal for her! She's always liked it because it has a long balcony at the back, and she says that all her life she's wanted——"

"Says!" He looked up, frowning. "You haven't told her!"

"Oh, no. Nobody! I thought you were the one to decide just what to do. Clyde, don't take another of those horrible pills, you took one only an hour ago!"

"I'll need my head to-night," he said, almost with a smile. But she noticed that his face looked ghastly.

"No, you're right, we'll have to move quietly until we've got it all worked out, and then spring it on them! Now, let me understand this, Rose. You represent your entire family legally, don't you?"

"Well, that was the ridiculous arrangement made when my father died," Rose explained, roused from a dream in which Cecy had both the camel's-hair coat and the brocade with the white fur for evenings, and Mary next winter appeared in beaver and army gray. "Mom hates business—you remember how helpless she was when we sold the Old Mill Lane house? Father had a guardianship for my grandfather, you know, and Father left everything to her. So that if there had been anything—which there wasn't!—I would——"

"There's something now!" Clyde said, in grim satisfaction.

"Well, then it may be different!" Rose said, contentedly. "I'll see that they all get more than their share, you may be sure of that. And, Clyde, what about a little closed car for me, so that I can drive every day —go out and get Mom? Oh, but Mom will be right here," she ended, with a little confused laugh.

They had left the table, and were back in the sitting room, and Rose had taken her usual chair. But Clyde now began to walk to and fro, and upon his face she saw an ugly pallor, and in his eyes an almost frightening light.

"Jack Talbot will be the first to want justice done ——" she began, feeling the usual little happy twist in her heart on the name. But Clyde, his brows knitted, interrupted her.

"Just a minute, Rose! There's something I'm thinking out!" he said.

Then there was silence within. But outside the window Rose could hear the wind howling uneasily, and the slish of water blown from the mill, and the creaking of the dismal old trees that shut in the house. Far below, in State Street, beneath the cliff, and the scarred walls of the quarry, an occasional motor horn squawked and was still. There was no moon, there were no stars, to-night.

A sudden nervousness seized her, a sensation that horrors, fears, strange dangers were abroad, and might force an entry to this quiet, ugly, lonely room that seemed pulsating to-night with unnatural light, unnatural possibilities and menaces. She longed to catch that envelope and throw it upon the slow, sucking flames that moved in the old steel-rodded grate.

Suppose one suddenly burst into noisy laughter——

Rose jumped as Clyde spoke.

He was standing a few feet away from her, his head hanging forward a little, like that of some threatening animal. His face was livid and his eyes gleamed with a ferocious light. He made a twisting gesture with his knotted fist.

"By God!" he said, in a tone so full of hate and triumph that Rose felt an actual sensation of fear. "By God, they'll pay for it, every penny! I'll drag that boy in the dust, and his precious mother and wife with him! There'll be no compromise—not one cent! I'll punish them until I've had my fill, and then I'll drive them out of this town for ever and ever!"

"But, Clyde," Rose stammered, frightened and aghast at his passion, "how can you drive them out! He's not responsible for what his father did! I can't *bear* to hear you talk so! Can't we—can't we share it and be happy

about it? Isn't there enough—and more than enough—for us all?"

"We'll be happy about it, all right!" Clyde muttered, beginning to pace the floor again. "But he'll not. Oh, no, my boy, you've had it your way too long! Now it's my turn—now it's my turn. Now, listen, Rose, and see if you can get this through your head," he suddenly began. "Your grandfather and Jack Talbot's father started this business in 1879, with about five hundred dollars capital. Your grandfather was incapacitated, a little later, as you know, and Talbot carried it on alone. He made money—a few thousands a year until, say, seven years later. Then the 'Centipede' caught on, and for a few years he made pretty big money, built his house, and all that. Then came the panic years, and he had to put every cent he made back into it. But since that time, and that's nearly thirty years!—he's built up a big business. Only last year we put sixty thousand dollars into a new building—every cent the Talbots have got, as far as I know, is in it. I've never heard of any other securities, except perhaps the house, and a lot here and there, have you? The River Street building belongs to the firm——"

"I know——" she said, vaguely anxious and uneasy, and with a frown between her beautiful eyes.

"Well, now you begin to calculate, Rose. Half interest in '80, and '81, and '82, and so on until to-day! Back payments plus compound interest, at fifty per cent.!"

"But—but, Clyde, dear, we can't expect them to p[illegible] all that," Rose protested. She was very pale. "[illegible] that would be—thousands!"

"It will be every red cent they have in the w[illegible]

Clyde said, in cold triumph. "Jack Talbot will come crawling to me for a job, and he'll see what he'll get! He'll be beggared——!"

He stopped upon the triumphant word, and there was a deathlike stillness in the room broken only by his quick, nervous footfalls as he walked to and fro. His mouth was shut like a trap, his nostrils dilated, his eyes narrowed.

"Clyde," Rose said, in a dry voice, and trembling. "I can't—I can't permit it! I only thought it meant some money—it meant reinstating Mom and Grandpa with the town people. But I never thought of that!"

"You'll take the roof from off his head," Clyde said, panting. "You'll live in the Talbot house!"

Agitated and pale, she came up to him, and arrested him with a hand upon his arm.

"Clyde! Why do you hate him so? It's not—human," she pleaded.

"Hate him?" he echoed, with an astonished look. "Don't you?"

Rose stared at him horrified, sick revulsion in her heart.

"Oh, no, Clyde, never! I talked like a little fool! I was angry and young—I didn't know anything about life! I didn't know how I'd feel when I was older—when I had a child!"

"You talk like a fool now, Rose," he said, shaking her off.

"No, but, Clyde," she persisted, eagerly, swallowing d with a dry throat, following him as he walked "listen. There is no need for cruelty and re- Why, what would life be if one didn't learn than that! All you need do is see Jack, have

a long talk, make any arrangement you like. You have stock; that and this fifty per cent. make us the largest stockholders, anyway! He can go on, just the same——"

"Oh, is that *so?*" Clyde muttered, abstractedly, paying to this fantastic theory not even the poor compliment of answering it. "No," he said, in deep and snarling satisfaction, "no, he won't go on just the same! Not *quite*. I've got him now."

"Clyde, it is horrible to hear you speak so!" Rose exclaimed, but she knew that he did not hear her. He had flung himself down at the little desk, where he often worked in the evenings, and now, grasping a pad of paper and a pencil, he began to calculate briskly, staring at his figures for a second, moving that sheet aside, and commencing anew on a fresh sheet.

"Clyde——" she pleaded, and was silent.

"Kindly don't bother me now, Rose!" he said, briskly and absently. And she heard him add to himself, "I wonder if I can prove Jack Talbot knew about this!" Slowly, and with a sick heart, Rose went upstairs.

The old house was full of sinister creaking and whispering as she mounted to the gloomy upper region, and Rose thought that she had never heard so uneasy a wind as that which rattled shutters and bent boughs with great sweeping rushes of sound in the cool and restless blackness of the garden. Her heart was hammering hard with a sort of vague terror, and she felt strangely heavy and depressed.

"I wonder if I am going to be sick?" she thought, with a first pang of miserable responsibility. "I can't be sick now! I *couldn't* leave Clyde to handle all this—he mightn't be fair to Mom—he wouldn't be——!"

And in as desolate a mood as her twenty-six years had ever known, she went in to stand beside Mary's bed, in the cold nursery where she slept with the child. Somehow she could not console herself now with the thought that the baby snuggled there in a little ball would be rich some day, that the beaver-trimmed coat was only the first of a thousand glorious possibilities.

"I'm cold," Rose said, sneezing, and glancing fearfully at the gloom in the bedroom behind her, and the rattling nursery shutter.

Even with windows and doors closed, in Clyde's bleak big bedroom, the gas flame sucked and fluttered, and the treacherous swooping of the wind about the house frightened her. Somewhere a door was banging, was still—banged again. Rose, fidgeting over her book, reflected that it was probably the door that led up to the attic from the back passage, but she dared not traverse the lonely halls to close it.

She had a little grate fire lighted and had moved her chair as close to it as was safe. But the big dim spaces of the room behind her seemed filled with ominous potentiality, and she found herself over and over again starting nervously and glancing over her shoulder.

It would have been a comfort to get into her own bed—somehow the sturdy pillows and bedhead at one's back were reassuring—but there was no light in the nursery that made reading there possible. She kept looking off her book absently, a frown between her brows. Suppose that she should really be ill now, or even die—be killed in an auto crash, for instance, as women were every day; then what a cruel mess of things Clyde would make!

No, she would have to fight desperately for every

ounce of cool reason, persuasiveness, self-control, now, if she expected to influence Clyde in the matter. The inheritance was hers, it was true, but then that would have small value in his eyes! He would as confidently attempt to dictate her course to her as if she were Mary! And if she made matters too difficult, she well knew that there was no extreme to which he would not go. Where she begged for tolerance he would force her to radical measures, to bitter publicity, to exposures that would brand the name of Talbot with undying shame.

Her one hope was to win him to reasonableness by that judicious mixture of opposing pressure and diplomatic concession in which she had had so many lessons during her married years. If she would do this, would he do that? Wouldn't it be wiser, just for the sake of the Iron Works, to have Jack Talbot remain as assistant manager? And if it would be wiser to retain him, then wouldn't it perhaps be better not to let Gates Mill know too much of the ins and outs of the transaction? Certainly she would give Clyde this power in the matter and take his advice on that, but in return would he be as generous as he could toward his fallen adversary?

Her weary brain fairly hummed with imaginary conversations; she felt frightened and sick with the fears that she was overlooking some probability, or that in some unsuspected way Clyde might obtain complete control of the situation and act in her name, in some fashion that would cause her bitter regret for the rest of her life.

"Oh, now that we've found that—that accursed paper!" she exclaimed, half-aloud, "now that there's so much money—enough for everyone, and a hundred

times more than enough!—why does this horrible complication have to come in? Why is Clyde so bitter? Why can't we all just be happy, ourselves and the Talbots, and Cecy marrying her Bozzy, without lawsuits and fights and all the rest of it! Oh, heavens—heavens, heavens—if the wind wouldn't blow so hard!"

She twisted her wrist, glanced at her watch. It was half-past ten.

"I *wish* Clyde would come upstairs!" she said, fearfully, and quite aloud. It was horrifying to think of him still ghoulishly busy at his revengeful figuring. Her heart rose in her throat as the door of her closet swung slowly open, and for a few seconds she was actually paralyzed with fright. Outside the shutters rattled and the trees creaked and swished. "I could scream myself to death and he wouldn't hear me!" thought Rose.

She had only to cross the floor, to descend the dimly lighted stairs, and to open the back sitting-room door to find him. But she dared not stir.

Oh, if it were only morning again! Had it ever been daylight? Had she ever walked cheerfully and confidently about this gloomy house, chattering to Mary?

"If we could move *out* of this place!" she thought, angrily. "But he never will! Now, when I have everything, when I could have everything, go anywhere—he will ruin it all, take the life out of it all!"

Suddenly, above the whining of the wind, the rushing of tree branches, the joggling shutters and far-off booming doors, above the whispering in the chimney and the sinister quiet sucking of the gas flame, her whole body seemed to convulse, to plunge with utter terror. She had heard a human voice—shouting—screaming——

Rose staggered to the door, put her hand upon it, panting with fright.

"Oh, what is it!" she cried. "My God, what is it!"

Still the wild uproar without, and the whispering, creaking, sucking within, but she heard no other sound.

"I heard it!" she said aloud, with a dry and salty mouth, and with her whole chest heaving upon terrified breath. And as she stood listening she heard it again, something between a cry and a shout—her own name: "*Rose!*"

Instantly, not knowing how she moved, she was downstairs, she had torn open the sitting-room door.

The light in the cracked green shade was burning quietly, the fire had fallen to pink afterglow, papers were strewn over the table. The wind, quiet for a second, spoke at the shutters like a low voice.

Clyde was standing with his back to the table, resting against it, his face ashen, his breath quick. As Rose came in he moved his eyes from the window to her face, and she saw that his waxen forehead was wet.

"Well, I don't know what that was!" he said, in a low tone, putting his hand on her shoulder in a great gasp of relief, as if the touch of warm flesh and blood awakened him from some horrifying dream. "I don't know what that was! I thought—I must have been asleep——!"

She smiled at him reassuringly, white-faced still, but with all her vague terrors dissipated by the mere nearness of something else that was living, something that was human.

"You frightened me!" she said, panting.

"I must have been dreaming," he repeated, still in a puzzled, low tone, his eyes going to the window again. "I thought that—it seemed to me——"

"Did you think you heard something?" she asked, glancing at the hall door.

"At the window!" he amended, looking toward it once more. "The shutters were open, like that. I opened them and locked them back, because they rattled less this way! It seemed to me that something moved there—looked in——!"

"That's over the cliff, Clyde!" she reassured him, courageously, although she was frightened herself by his manner and his words. "Anybody to be there would have to squeeze about the corner, and wedge his way along that little stony ledge where the heliotropes are! You just imagined it——"

In a strangely silent, docile mood, he allowed her to straighten his papers, hammer down the fire, and put out the lights.

"Where did you keep this to-day?" he asked, indicating the precious old document as he followed her upstairs.

"I shut it into my Bible!" But even as she spoke Rose realized that her point of view had changed so radically in the last few hours that it would seem almost sacrilege to place it there again. This little breeder of change and trouble had nothing in common with the great words of love and brotherhood, of sharing and forgiving!

Clyde went to his own room, and presently Rose heard his heavy breathing in sleep. After a last look and a last kiss for Mary, she put out her light and got into bed.

But there was no sleep for her until almost dawn, on this first night as a consciously rich woman. Try as she might, she could not make visions of prosperity, of triumphant purchases and pleasures, seem real. What

was real was the hammering of her heart, the disturbing uproar of the wind in the black night, the fearful responsibility of seeing that somehow Mom and Cecy and Grandpa were fairly treated; anxiety that she herself should not fall ill and so fail them; nervousness lest in conceding Clyde some responsibility she should not concede him too much, apprehension on a hundred counts that had never existed in her life before.

"If you do that I will leave you, Clyde!" she imagined herself saying as she tossed restlessly from side to side. But how could she leave him and go on living in a community that would say that Rose Kirby had left her husband the minute she had any money of her own? And how could she leave the man that was manager and vice-president of the big business in which this fortune of hers was invested? In any case, there was Mary; he would know well what weapon he had there, he would fight for a share of Mary, and the child's little life would be wrecked in the very start.

"Jack, I'm so sorry it's turned out this way!" she would find herself repeating, a few minutes later. "I had no idea—I wouldn't willingly have made it so hard for you. I know you can make a fresh start, I know that you can support Edith and your mother some day. But it isn't my fault that you all leave Gates Mill with a cloud over your name! I'd undo the whole wretched business if I could!"

She shook up her pillow, settled her cheek against it resolutely, closed her eyes. The cuckoo clock in the hall, that detestable cuckoo clock that seemed always to hiccup dismally in the unnatural gloom, or the smothered unnatural sunlight of the place, sounded a sepulchral twelve.

"Clyde, I will concede you everything! You may arrange matters as far as Mom and Cecy are concerned just as you like, I'll sign anything, tell them what you please. But *please* don't let us have any publicity about it, any dragging of Old Man Talbot's name in the mud, for the sake of the family! Edith's going to have a baby, I know she and Jack are unhappy, and they're ruined! Isn't that enough? Keep him on at the Works for awhile; let it all seem to come gradually and naturally——"

She was wide-awake again. Exhausted with emotional fatigue and excitement, still she could not get to sleep.

Clyde might agree to that. But then would that really be fair to Mom, Cecy, little Audrey, Ned, and Grandpa? To be sure, Rose was legally sole heiress, but they had really as much claim as she had. And if she signed away their rights, or a portion of them, would Rose be honest in her stewardship?

Clyde would do something for them, of course, settle it all definitely to the last detail. But what he did would be very different from what Rose would do, from what should be done. There would be no spirit of joyous sharing, of delightful relaxation after the years of strain.

"I *will* get to sleep!" Rose thought, feverishly. And immediately, before her weary, aching eyeballs, a vision of Jack Talbot seemed to rise: Jack, half-smiling, yet with that new gentleness and patience expressed upon his sunburned face, and with those odd little touches of silver in his fair hair. He had learned something in the bitter years, too, he had learned to be kind, understanding; she felt the change in him whenever they spoke together.

Here they were, the man and woman who had loved each other so deeply as boy and girl, who might have had so wonderful a life together! And Rose was lying wakeful in utter discouragement and fear, in a dreary, storm-blown upper chamber in the Bainbridge house, while Jack was perhaps sleeping in entire unconsciousness of the thunderbolt that was so soon to wreck his whole life.

The cuckoo clock struck one, and immediately afterward there was another sound that brought Rose erect in the darkness.

"What's that!" It was Clyde shouting as he ran out into the hall. Rose, almost fainting under the fresh shock, joined him, gathering a wrapper about herself with trembling fingers, gulping with a dry throat, terrified eyes upon his face.

His hair was tumbled into unwonted disorder above his anxious face; he carried a wavering candle.

"My God, this is terrible!" he whispered, sharply. "What a frightful night! It was downstairs in the passage—or it sounded so—did it sound so to you?"

"I don't know!" she said, with chattering teeth. In the silence, as they stared at each other, the wind made a battering assault upon the roof, and the trees shrieked.

Clyde began cautiously to descend the stairs, and Rose followed. They went through the lower hall, and after shouting a query through the side door, he half-opened it, Rose's eyes peering over his shoulder.

A wild volley of flying air, flinging it open, extinguished both the candle and the gas that Clyde had lighted. But not before a rush of feet and the stir

of some bulky form in the howling dark had apprised them that their alarm had not been imaginary.

Instantly Clyde sprang out into the dark, shouting furiously, and Rose was obliged to accord his courage her surprised admiration. He moved blindly about for a few seconds, and returned to the passage she had shakingly lighted again.

She admitted him through a guarded space, and they regarded each other in astonishment.

"There was someone there, all right!" Clyde said, breathing hard. "I saw him!"

"Yes. Oh, yes, I saw somebody, too!" Rose did not speak naturally, but he was too agitated to notice it.

"Rose, who could know about that paper?"

This time she was less confused.

"Nobody, Clyde. I spoke to nobody!"

"That was the fellow I saw at the window tonight!" Clyde said, darkly, going upstairs. "All right, my boy, whoever you are! Make another attempt, make ten, if you want to! You'll not get far."

Presently he was asleep again, but Rose heard the clock cuckoo punctually for two o'clock, for three o'clock, for four. A wild and stormy dawn, with strange light like the light under water, was creeping over the dark and ugly wallpaper of her room before she fell asleep.

But on one score she had not shared Clyde's puzzlement and alarm. Just before the candlelight had been whirled away upon the shrieking wind at the side passage she had gained a glimpse of the intruder that had been evidently missed by Clyde. It was only a frightened impression, suggested rather than shown,

in the inky dark, and to be remembered and identified after it was gone rather than in that wild brief second.

But that brief second had been sufficient for her to recognize him.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE morning brought a troubled and fitful sunlight that was yet as sweet as June to Rose's waking eyes. Mary, with Tubby, the bear, Raggedy Anne, and a handful of small celluloid animals, awakened her mother early, established herself firmly in her mother's bed against Rose's face and shoulder, and began an undertoned conversation with her toys.

Rose groaned, laughed, kissed such portions of the sturdy little form as came her way, and finally dragged herself up, aching all over, and feeling jaded and weary. She moved about the house languidly, in heaviness of spirit. It took her a long time to straighten the rooms, she thought apathetically that she would go to see her mother this morning, reflected that she could hardly conceal from the loving eyes at home that something momentous had happened.

Clyde was brisk and well-groomed at the breakfast table, but Rose, who sat back wearily sipping her hot coffee, and feeling life vague and blank about her, thought that he looked tired, too.

The wind was still blowing hard and strong, and the morning paper announced a heavy storm coming. Dark clouds scudded over the pale sky, and the garden was battered and torn cruelly, the air was heavy with the coming rain.

Clyde had warned her to secrecy at breakfast.

"I'm going to take the contract down to Hawkes to-

morrow in San Francisco," he said. "Meanwhile, the less talk there is about it, the better! But mind one thing, Rose, we're going to push this thing through to the finish! It's going to cost them every penny they have before I'm through!"

"Don't say that, Clyde," Rose answered, with what spirit she could muster. "I'm in this, too, you know. There's no need to be cruel, or to hurt people, especially as all this money has come our way! Can't we be simple——"

"Leave it to me!" he interrupted her briefly, in displeasure.

"Why not leave it to me?" she answered, boldly, her heart pounding.

He gave her one look.

"If you propose to protect Jack Talbot in this matter, Rose," he said, warningly, "you do it at your own risk! Cross me in this thing, and I'll prove that he knew of it—that his father told me so on his deathbed! I'll send him to jail."

"You can't!" she breathed, outraged.

"You'll see if I can or can't. I'll tear this whole town wide open," Clyde said. "I'll prove that you and Jack Talbot have been seen alone together, driving up at the Dam—other places!—and that to protect him you would rob your own child and your own family——!"

"Why, how dare you!" she whispered, turning white.

"You'll see what I dare. Do you suppose I'm not ready for this thing?" Clyde said. "Play my game, Rose, and you and your family will be taken care of, will be the big people of the town. But if you double-cross me on this——!"

His eyes glinted; he was smiling. Rose felt sick with fear and shame and contempt.

"You could never prove that he knew any such thing," she began, "because when you told me of it you said nothing of Jack's knowing, you distinctly said that his father *hadn't* told him—hadn't wanted him to know, and I'll say so!"

"And suppose I could produce a paper written by me a few days after the old man's death, carefully repeating all that he had said, and that he had told his son this years before?" Clyde asked. Rose, watching his smile, knew instantly that he had foreseen this hour, and that the story of Jack's complicity was a lie.

"They would know that you had written it five minutes before you produced it!" she said, hotly and scornfully.

"What?" he asked, with a simulation of smiling surprise, "how could they think that if it has been safely locked in Old Man Rogers's safety-deposit box for five years?"

She looked at him, feeling almost faint with repugnance and apprehension.

"You didn't——?" she breathed, barely audible.

"Yes, but I did! Indeed I did. I wrote the whole thing out while it was fresh in my mind, and handed that paper to Rogers, in the Bank, five years ago, told him that it was important, and asked him please just to put it away with his own papers until I asked him for it!" Clyde's triumphant tone dropped to one of persuasive yet confident advice. "Better let me handle this my own way, Rose," he said. "Whatever you do you can't save this man who didn't think you were good enough to marry him six years ago, and you will

only make an infinite amount of misery for yourself and your family!"

He slammed the front door behind him as he departed, and Rose stood still, staring dully at the spot where he had stood. A second later a shout of almost animal anger, from the garden outside, frightened her, and she opened the front door again.

Clyde was running toward his car, brought by Datchi as usual to the gate, and rising from the earth where he had stumbled or been pushed was Rose's patriarchal old grandfather, with his face livid with anger and one fist shaken at Clyde.

"You get out of here!" Clyde shouted, jumping into his car. "You hang around here too much! Get *out*——"

Rose, shouting herself, knew that her own voice and that of the old man were drowned alike in the roaring of the engine.

"Grandpa! Come back! Come in and see us!" she called, as loudly as she could, as the car swept away, Clyde furious and stern at the wheel. Her anger rose hotly at the thought that Clyde could harm him, could strike at her grandfather; he had never shown such open contempt and antagonism before. But the old man did not seem to hear her. He brushed himself off, walking toward the gate meanwhile, and just as Rose expected that he would turn and come back to her, he vanished unexpectedly at the top of the steep flight of wooden steps that led down into State Street.

Disappointed, angry, agitated, she turned back, moving about the house lifelessly and with dragging feet, shuddering in the cool hallways and dreary bedrooms. Suddenly she wondered if Clyde had left the contract upstairs.

If he were really going to San Francisco to-morrow, he would not take it to-day to the office safe where he kept all of his papers. In any case, Jack had access to that safe, and Clyde would never risk his finding it.

No, he had probably left it here. She had a sudden impulse to see it again, and while she put his room in order looked for it half-indifferently. But she did not find it.

The day dragged on, threatening, noisy, cold. There was an unearthly colour about the occasional rifts of pale sunlight that was somehow worse than the clouds. Cecy, telephoning blithely, sang cheerfully that she and Bozzy were going into Emville to see that film, anyway. Mom was bringing Audrey into Gates Mill after school to the dentist, and would get up to see Rose if she could. Grandpa had been out, half the night, roaming about in the storm. "You know how restless and queer a big storm will make him!" Cecy reminded her sister. "He's just come in, and he's sound asleep now."

Rose bundled Mary warmly, and they went out into the backyard at about eleven o'clock, to rake and sweep among the blown leaves, with the fresh wild air assaulting them from all sides.

"She's going to be a hummer when she gets here!" shouted the grocery boy, admiringly, of the storm.

"Won't she, though!" Rose shouted back, gathering up the wild blown tendrils of her glorious hair. Mary shouted, too, running the length of the garden with hat ribbons and little apron flying, and running back with red cheeks to her mother's arms.

Rose and the baby were both rosy and breathless as they came in to luncheon, but afterward, during

Mary's nap, Rose felt an odd oppression and a strange nervousness beginning to take possession of her again. The house was very still.

She had a fire in the back sitting room, and sat there, restless and fidgety, with her darning. Datchi was out; Rose had intended to make a pie for dinner. But with the eager efficiency of his race, the Japanese had anticipated her, and the pie was made. The kitchen was clean, cool, empty.

At about three o'clock she telephoned to the dentist. Had Mrs. Kirby brought in the little girl yet? The suave pleasant voice came back: Mrs. Kirby had cancelled the appointment because of the storm.

With an unaccountable sensation of forlornness, Rose called her mother's house, but there was no response. Mother and Audrey were away from home, anyway.

"I hope they are on their way to me, I'll keep them for dinner and send them home in a taxi!" Rose mused, rebelliously. "Why shouldn't I? I don't care whether Clyde likes it or not!"

She stood at the side window, looking down over the steep side of the quarry, and as she looked her heart sank; the storm was coming now in good earnest.

With a wild rush of gray rain it broke over the world, and in five minutes the downpour and the gathering winter dark combined together to shut her into solitude. She could only see the dim, whirling lines of the slate-coloured water, falling with such violence that the mud danced up under it in the garden, and rivulets began to run down the edge of the garden walks.

Just before the worst of it Clyde came in, blown, pale, and evidently tired; his white night had not agreed with him. He had a headache and seemed as nervous

and uneasy as Rose was. He planned to get some sleep, he said, and get the six o'clock train in the morning for San Francisco. His head was very bad, he had almost had a bad fall in the office to-day, from sheer vertigo and heaviness.

"You've been taking those horrible pills!" Rose reproached him, automatically sympathetic as she turned down his big, flat, lifeless bed, and helped him into it. He seemed dazed with pain. "There's something I want to say to you, Clyde," she said, gently, when he had plunged wretchedly in. "I'm sorry to say it when you feel so badly, but I've made up my mind. I can't let you use this information about the Talbots in the way you propose! It's my affair, after all. I won't agree to publicity and revenge and all the rest of it—I can't!"

He made no answer, he did not stir. Was he already asleep? The cold rain sluiced and smoked about the house, gutters ran noisily from the roof, great sheets of water blew across the dull twilight of the window.

"You'll have to make the paper public, out of justice to your own people," Clyde said, his voice rising hollowly in the damp shadiness of the room. "The rest will take care of itself! I saw Judge Raymond to-day, and he says that paper is unquestionably valid."

"I don't have to make the paper public! It can all be arranged privately!" Rose protested. But she was afraid of him again, despite her desperate effort not to be, and she knew that he knew it.

"I won't discuss it! When you're needed in the affair, I'll consult you," he said, into his pillow. "But that will be some time from now!"

She stood watching, bitterness choking in her throat.

How far could he go without her? He had negotiated the sale of Mom's house, could he use Rose's name without her authority in this connection, too?

"Clyde——?" she began. There was no answer, and from the bed came the faint audible breathing of heavy sleep.

Rose watched him a minute, then she went quietly in to get Mary and continued on downstairs.

She was weary, lonely, uneasy, wretched. The gas sputtered and the fire burned; the child played quietly with her blocks, and Rose sat watching her with a serious face. She seemed to herself in a terrible dream; it seemed days—months—that she had been shut up in this dismal house of draughts and shadows and unnatural silence, bound a prisoner by the rain and the wind. Somehow—anyhow—this accursed money must get them out of this house—get them somewhere where there were neighbours, open spaces, lights, voices!

Drip. Drip. Drip. Outside there was nothing but splashing and trickling and sluicing darkness, the steady downward hammering of the rain. Rose, looking out of the window, saw only the mirrored ugliness of the gas-lighted room and a battered branch of lilac bowed under the storm.

Lilac! Had there ever been balmy, perfumy days when the lilacs bloomed in the shade, and the roses scented the whole town with their delicious sweetness? Had there ever been a gay, confident, happy Rose Kirby, dancing through life without a penny in her pocket or a care upon her soul?

She heard Clyde shouting and went upstairs. There was too much noise in his own room, it appeared; he was moving to the spare room, to which Rose followed him.

with his hot-water bag and extra comforter. She left him chattering in the clean cold sheets and went into his own room, to straighten it and re-make the bed.

His clothes were flung upon a chair; it was not until she had his coat in her hands and was approaching the closet with it that Rose realized that the contract must be there.

Clyde came downstairs in his wrapper, his face blotched from the effect of too-heavy sleep, his eyes blurred, just at dinner-time. He was too physically wretched to talk much, he ate his soup in silence, seeming to brood darkly as he ate.

"I've been upset to-day!" he said, closing his eyes and breathing like a man who is ill.

"You had a bad night," Rose offered, almost suffocated by the rapid beating of her heart, against which the paper of the old contract rested. Her thoughts moved busily. If she could only get out to Mom's to-night, if only Ned were home! She must talk this over with somebody before Clyde secured possession of this paper again, and he would surely discover its loss before he left on the six o'clock train to-morrow! Ah, if only it were morning—just daylight! Rose breathed. Things might be hard in daylight, but in the evening dark and storm they seemed frightening, insurmountably difficult, menacing.

In answer to her thoughts she heard the encircling batter of the rain. Nobody would be abroad to-night——!

At half-past seven the doorbell rang sharply, making them both start nervously in their chairs. Clyde, who had been drowsing heavily, was instantly alert.

"That's young Paul and Joe Bundy, from the office," he said. "There were some things I wanted to go over with them before I went to the city."

The two men, blown, breathless, shaking wet umbrellas, spreading wet overcoats, came in, and Rose welcomed them. But immediately, to her intense uneasiness, Clyde went upstairs, and she knew, when he came down and called her name from the hall a few seconds later, that he had discovered the loss of the paper.

She went out into the hall, closing the sitting-room door behind her, and so frightened that she was conscious of an instinctive sense of comfort that there were two men in the house, and that Clyde dared not touch her.

"Rose," Clyde said, measuredly, with the sly yet confident smile of actual insanity in his eyes, "give me that contract."

"Clyde," she answered, mildly and reproachfully, fright lending her a self-protective air of calm, "you took a dreadful chance with that paper—leaving it in your vest that way! If you had done that in the office——"

He was instantly quieted.

"My head was splitting!" he pleaded, in a tone of apology coloured by a deep relief. "Where did you put it?"

"I put it—in a safe place!"

"Where?"

"Go in to those men," Rose temporized, her heart almost suffocating her, "and I'll bring it to you!"

He obeyed her readily enough, and for one minute she stood in the hall, with her hands pressed tight over her heart, and her breath coming quick and light. She

glanced upstairs, all was quiet there. Datchi, who did not sleep in the house, was gone for the night, Mary was peacefully asleep. Rose dropped on her knees on the lower step of the stairs, her hands pressing her eyelids, her whole spirit and mind one wild prayer. If she put that paper into Clyde's hands, in a minute more, it would be too late!

Then quietly, and feeling as if she had done all this before, she took her heavy coat from the rack, and slipped out into the blackness and the storm.

The wind caught at her like a sentient thing, and for a minute the roar and riot about her frightened her, and she blindly turned back to the gaslighted bareness and quiet of the hall.

But the latch, she knew, was closed, and to rattle her house key in it meant that Clyde might hear her and open the door. Rose hesitated no longer, but catching her coat about her, ran down the drenching garden path, bumping herself into shrubs and bushes, and bending her head to face the howling gale and the beating deluge.

She gained the gate and struggled along the lane, feeling the cold wash of water drenching her face, and the drops penetrating her clothing, chilly and damp. Where she was going, or why she was out in this downpour, she did not know, but at the corner of the lane she steadied herself by a fence picket, put the streaming tendrils of her blown hair into some sort of order, and attempted also to order the wild confusion of her thoughts.

Her mother—she must get to her mother! But what good would that do? Clyde would know that she was there and would follow her; he would perhaps persuade Cecy and Mom that his judgment in this matter was wisest, and that if old Talbot had done a dishonourable

thing, the more fully the arrogant Talbots paid the price the better. And then Clyde's icy fury would be directed against his wife——!

"I'll have to divorce him!" Rose told the shrieking elements, actually bowing her shoulders under a fall of water that struck her like the contents of an overturned bucket. But divorce him for what? And then there was Mary to consider——

"I must get down to River Street and the trolley," she thought, "before there is a general alarm. I must see Mom!"

And immediately an investigation of her pockets, with wet fingers, told her that she had come off without a cent of money; there was only her key, her handkerchief, a little toy of Mary's.

Well, then, she must walk. And Rose set off almost at a run, half-laughing and half-crying at the desperate plight into which one of the richest women in town had found herself so suddenly precipitated.

The vicious wind tore at her, and every few hundred feet found her resting, spent and dripping, against some unfamiliar, bewildering bit of fence, or clinging to some rough, kindly tree.

"I suppose we will get over this," Rose said aloud, as she ran. "I suppose Clyde will not kill me, and things will get back into a normal groove, and Cecy wi marry—and summer will come! Oh, summer!" s thought, wistfully, "how I would love it to be sum again, with the fields all yellow, and the shadows oaks around the Dam!"

And with the thought came that of Jack, a found that somehow she had blundered into t bots' side garden, and was in sight of the storm-

shining red lights that were their windows. Out under the swaying and creaking great trees came the heartening beams, speaking of shelter, peace, comfort, and no lost traveller in a strange forest ever staggered toward them more desperately, more gratefully than did Rose. She was crying as she mounted the porch steps and rang the bell, following the ring with eager knocking of her streaming hands against the door, in a sudden panic of fear that Clyde might be close behind her.

Instantly there was a stir within, and Jack Talbot opened it, and stood in the pleasant ruddy warmth of the hall inside, staring at her and too much amazed to speak.

CHAPTER XXIX

When she saw him Rose knew that she had always loved him and always would; fright, fatigue, anxiety seemed to drop from her like the wet cloak that slipped to the floor, and with a great sob of joy and relief she went into his arms.

They closed about her, and she felt their delicious strength and gentleness, and caught the old faint flavour of homespun and tobacco and clean, sunburned skin that she remembered from the happy long-ago, and she rested her face against his shoulder, and her hard-beating heart grew quieter against his own heart.

He looked down at her from his height; the glorious hair was blown loose into a sopping tangle of curls and waving tendrils, her eyes were shut, and the dark lashes were sopping, too. But he saw the colour come back into her white face as she clung there quietly, like a spent bird, and for a long minute he held her so, asking no questions and voicing none of the fright he felt.

So big, so strong, so kind—Rose wondered why she had ever been nervous and worried and agitated about anything while Jack was in the world!

"Jack," she whispered, raising her head and opening her blue eyes, "I'm so glad to get here!"

Half-supporting her still, he only looked at her steadily.

"I'm—I'm in trouble!" she said, panting, "and I had to come to you!"

An odd, constrained look came into his face, but it was with his gentlest smile that he said:

"I'm so glad you did, dear!"

"Jackie!" his mother called very softly, from the drawing room. "Who is it, ducky?"

He glanced in her direction, nodded to Rose, and taking her hand led her across the hall into the little study opposite the drawing room, where he closed the door. And as he did so Rose remembered the days when the Talbot house had seemed to her girlhood's eyes a mecca never to be reached, and when her entry here to-night, a terrified, disillusioned, weary, and storm-beaten woman, would have seemed only a mad dream.

There was a furnace downstairs, and the house was not cold, but Jack's first act was to light the wood fire that was laid in a small open fireplace, and as Rose knelt shuddering beside it, it seemed to her that the returning warmth and the quiet about her would stop her heart with the very shock of contrast.

The flames mounted crackling about dry oak and madrone logs, and Jack lighted a richly shaded lamp behind him and went from the room without a word. When he came back he was carrying something that Rose drank in two grateful swallows from a glass, and over his arm was a great woolly bathrobe.

"Take off those sopping things," he directed her, anxiously, "and those shoes and stockings! Here, I'll turn my back. Take off everything that's really wet through, Rose, or you'll be ill! Here, here are slippers —look at your poor foot in my big slippers! Get into that chair. Now take your time——!"

Exquisitely warm in the big muffling folds of the wrapper, and with half her clothing spread upon daven-

port and chairs in the warm gloom of the room behind her, Rose's recuperation from cold and strain was almost instantaneous. She lay back luxuriously, her drying hair in damp strands over the big chintz back of the chair, her bare feet thrust into the big slippers.

"Rose, would you drink some coffee if I went and got a pot of it and put it right here?" Jack asked, watching her with a sort of concerned satisfaction.

"No, no!" she answered, quickly, and he noted with some surprise that she was drying a little sheet of folded creased paper by holding it toward the flames.

"I told Mother that a man had come to see me—I half expected a fellow—to talk about the tennis courts at the Club," Jack said, "and I can take you home without your being seen, so take your time. Edith is sick, you know——"

"Edith sick?" Rose asked, with widening eyes. "Why, Mary and I saw her riding yesterday, I thought!"

"Yes, she was," he answered, briefly, with a slight frown. "She—nothing serious. But she's been reckless, you know, and Newman was pretty well worried about it for awhile. I've had to tell her"—Jack grinned—"that I'd sell her horse if she got on him again! She wrenched herself, dismounting yesterday—not serious, as I say. But there's no sense in taking such chances!"

"Jack," Rosalind said, suddenly, folding the dry paper and turning a little pale, "I wanted to talk to you!"

"Your coming," he answered, slowly, as she paused, "is—I think, the nicest thing that has ever happened to me! Just to have you sitting there, in my wrapper——!" He stopped. "Well, I suppose we may

have that much friendship, mayn't we, Rose?" he asked. "That you will come to me when I can help you!"

"Or you," she added, quickly, with her heart beating with a sort of dizzying ecstasy, "or you come to me when I can help you, Jack!"

"You always do," he said, seriously. "The world is a better place for me just because you are in it, and whether I see you buying a box of apples in River Street, or walking along the lane with Mary, or waiting in the office for Clyde, I like to carry that picture until we meet again—of a woman who is always sweet, always helping somebody, loving somebody, smiling at somebody——!"

He was smiling himself as he stopped, but with eyes suddenly misted, and Rose's firm lips trembled a little as she listened, and she looked down.

"What a nice mess we have made of things, Rose!" he said, with a whimsical smile.

"You first," she reminded him, trying to joke.

"I first!" Jack sighed, looked down, and then smiled philosophically again. "Well, we have this hour," he said, "when you have come to me! Clyde got off on the evening train, then? He had such a frightful headache in the office to-day that he could hardly keep on his feet. Did he tell you?"

"No, Clyde's at home," Rose said.

"At home!" Jack echoed in astonishment. "Good heavens, does he know that you're here!"

"No, young Paul Long and Joe Bundy are there, talking business."

"But, my dear girl—won't he resent—what did you tell him?"

"I didn't tell him, Jack. I—ran away!"

"You've left him?" Jack asked, slowly.

"No, not exactly. You see——"

She stopped. He had got to his feet and laid his long, lean arm upon the mantel and his face upon his arm.

"My God, that I have not the right to protect you, dear!" she heard him say, in a tone that was half a groan and half a whisper.

"This is it," she said, abruptly, when he had sat down again. "Something has come up, Jack, that I know will surprise you. I *have* to talk to you about it, there's nobody else! Did you ever hear that your father and my grandfather had entered into a contract together thirty-five or more years ago?"

"About the 'Centipede,' yes," he answered to her astonishment, puzzled eyes upon her face.

"Did you know what that contract was, Jack?" Rose demanded.

"No, I didn't know anything except that it worried my father a little toward the end," Jack answered, innocently. "I'll tell you exactly how it happened. One day, when—when you and I were such good friends, he asked me if your grandfather ever talked rationally or if any of you ever said anything about his having been my father's partner years ago, and I said, 'No.' Then he said that your grandfather had been a brilliant man before he lost his mind—it all comes back to me now," Jack finished, with a faint frown of concentration, "but I didn't pay much attention then! He said that your grandfather had helped to design the 'Centipede,' I think, and that he—that is, my father—always felt responsible for your grandfather's accident, some-

thing like that—you know how much they all talk of old times! It didn't register with me."

"He told Clyde—differently," Rose said, slowly and significantly. Jack looked at her in surprise and expectation. "Before his death, only two or three days before," she went on, "your father sent for Clyde and told him that he and Grandfather had signed a contract about the Iron Works, which were of course just a little village shop then, and that that contract was valid, and that for all he knew, Grandpa had it still!"

Jack looked at her, stupefied.

"Dad told Clyde Bainbridge that!"

Rose nodded, swallowing.

"I didn't know this until after we were married," she said, and as an expression he neither fully sensed nor could control leaped into Jack's watching eyes she flushed faintly under the curling aureole of her burned-gold hair and nodded. "Yes, that was why he married me," she said, simply. "He has told me so fifty times! After we were married he spoke to me about the contract for the first time, and it seems that then—immediately after your father's death—Clyde sat down and made a very careful record of the whole thing, and had old Mr. Rogers, who hadn't of course the slightest idea of what it was, put the record into his safety-deposit vault."

"It sounds like Clyde," Jack commented, drily, in a pause.

"Doesn't it? Well, for years he has been talking about this paper——"

"Why didn't he come to me?" Jack demanded.

"He had no proof!"

"We might have found some. My God," Jack exclaimed in disgust, "how he does love to scheme and contrive and intrigue! What—has he any idea what the terms of the contract were? We can talk it over, I suppose? We might even find someone living who remembered something of it!"

The whole matter seemed to Rose to be moving from the noisome dank shadows of the long darkness into the curative, normal daylight.

"It has been found," she said.

"Found!" he echoed, incredulously.

"Yes, I found it yesterday—it seems a thousand years ago," Rose said. "It was shut into the lost volume of the set of Encyclopædias that Mom gave the Library years and years ago. You know everyone thought that volume had been burned when Grandpa's offices were burned after the accident, but I found it the other day. And in it was this contract."

She held the paper out to him, and Jack took it in his hand. But his eyes did not leave her face.

"You should have been having a percentage on the 'Centipede' all these years?" he asked, dazedly.

"Not only the 'Centipede,' Clyde says. The interests of the whole Iron Works!"

"My God!" he whispered. "You and little Cecy, and your mother taking roomers! Why, what was the matter with my father?" he asked, in simple bewilderment.

"Well, Grandpa was hurt, you know, and he did pay all his bills——"

"All his bills!" Jack echoed, suffocating with shame and astonishment. "All his bills! Why, I don't care if it had been five per cent., it would have kept you from need—from all you had to put up with when

you were only a plucky, brave, hard-working little clerk in his office!"

"There were bad years, you know," she offered, timidly; "years when all the profits had to go back into the business——"

"Yes, and there were good years, too!" Jack said, grimly, pacing the floor with the paper in his hand. "Does Clyde believe this is legal?" he asked, sitting down, smoothing out the contract, and bending his frowning eyes upon it.

"Oh, perhaps it isn't!" Rose exclaimed, thankfully. "But he is sure it is," she added, in a suddenly depressed tone.

Jack, who was reading the contract and who had turned a little pale, looked up.

"Rose, it wasn't an equal partnership?" he asked, in a low tone.

She flushed distressedly; exquisite, troubled, her blue eyes shining like sapphires in the rose and white of her face, she leaned toward him in the warm, rosy glow of fire and lamplight.

"That's—*it*, Jack!"

"Half?" he asked, in a deathly stillness.

"That's what Clyde says!" Rose told him, fearfully.

"And you starving in Old Mill Lane," he said, under his breath, as if to himself. "You and Cecy pressing your dresses and working in offices! Well, Rose, between us, we have pretty well ruined your life, father and son!"

She slid to her knees, half-embracing him with outstretched warm arms, bringing his cheek against her own, her eyes brimming with quick tears.

"Jack—Jack—don't say that!" she pleaded, trying to laugh. "Why, we were happier so! Those were the happiest days of my life! Do you remember the Sunday morning hot-cakes after church? And hot summer nights, going down to River Street? I'll never be so happy again! Do you think *money* is going to make me so? Why, I have been more wretched since I found this yesterday than ever in my life before!"

"This is my father's handwriting," Jack said, "and one of these witnesses is still alive. Half! Well, with Clyde owning what he now does, and you half of all the remainder, you practically own the old plant, Rose." He pushed back the rioting masses of her glorious hair and kissed her solemnly on the forehead he framed with his big, lean hands. "I congratulate you, dear!" he said.

But immediately, as she went back to her chair and he re-read the old paper, his eyes clouded afresh.

"Strictly speaking," he began, thoughtfully, "or not so strictly speaking, either, speaking only in common justice, you could make this very bad for me, Rose. There might be a question of interest here—compound interest——"

He looked at her, and instantly saw that this was no new thought to her, and for a long minute they sat silent, looking at each other.

"That's why I came to you," Rose said then, simply. "That's what Clyde wants to do!"

"Well," Jack said, smiling at her obvious distress, "he has that right!" But a minute later he added, "Does he realize that it would amount to more than the entire value of the Works?"

"Yes," Rose affirmed again, with all a child's con-

fidence in some potent elder or superior. "I came to tell you!"

"It ruins me—it ruins us all—Mother and every one of us!" Jack said, with a brief, bewildered laugh.

"It shall not," she promised, gravely. "But I don't know what to do. What shall I do? I can't keep this from Mom and Cecy, they have equal rights, even if I am legally the person who gets it all. And Clyde threatens—threatens——"

"What?" he asked.

"Everything!" she said, with a desperate motion of her hands. "He threatens to take your last cent, to brand your father as a thief; he even says—or he said to-night—that he will implicate you, if he can, with conspiracy in grand larceny——"

"He can't do that!" Jack assured her. But he was rather pale. "It's so rotten—coming just now, for Mother and Edith," he said. "But there's no reason for a scandal. I can just stay along in the Works—on a salary——"

"I can do a great deal with Clyde," Rose said, anxiously, "but not everything! I don't want to say anything disloyal, but there are moods——"

"You don't have to say anything to me, Rose. I see him at the office, you know."

"Well, then you know! There are times when he is hardly sane. He would hurt me through Mary—through Mom and Cecy—anyway, anyhow, just to force his will upon me! He says"—her eyes were luminous in their earnestness and distress—"he says that he doesn't want you to have anything to do with the Works any more! And Jack, Jack," Rosalind cried, beginning to breathe fast again, "he means it!

And if we are to avoid publicity and scandal, we shall have to move very carefully!"

"Why, my dear," Jack said, smiling at her reassuringly, and catching one of her hands in his own, "you mustn't worry so! Mother has this house, and Edith's father will stand by her until I get on my feet. Many a man has had a harder thing than this to live down. But I would be glad if he spared my father's memory, just for the sake of Mother and Edith!"

"I think," Rose said, thoughtfully, "that I can promise you that. If I make it my one and only condition that there is no publicity, and if I threaten to fight otherwise—— But that might mean Mary!" she interrupted herself in a whisper. "To give as my excuse that I didn't want him to use this contract to his full power—to make that any reason for divorcing him —why you can see how utterly absurd that would sound, Jack! And you can imagine just how dignified, and rational, and martyred Clyde would appear."

"You would divorce him, Rose?"

For a minute she did not answer, and Jack, studying the slender muffled figure in the gray chintz chair, the tumbled glory of the burned-gold curls, the flushed cheeks, and the childishly grave blue eyes that were fixed upon the fire, thought her suddenly the most radiant vision of womanhood that he had ever seen. In the soft lamplight there was an unearthly beauty of colouring about the whole picture, the white throat that the big open collar of the wrapper exposed, and the bare white foot from which the big slipper dangled.

"If I said 'yes' to that, Jack," she answered, presently, with a long sigh, "it would be as much for his happiness as mine. It is his nature to—to torment

whatever belongs to him. As for me," she added, half-aloud and as if she were merely voicing her thoughts, "I cannot think of the tiniest cabin anywhere, in woods, on a beach—the simplest three rooms anywhere, where I could not take my baby and be happy!"

"He would try to get possession of the baby?" Jack asked.

"He *would* get possession of her, part of the time, anyway. And he would never forgive me—I know his nature!—nor spare her."

"Is it partly that dope he takes, Rose?" Jack asked, after a frowning silence.

"Oh, partly, and partly those blinding headaches, and partly perhaps a little of the old jealousy of you——" she was beginning, her hand still linked in Jack's, and her eyes raised with a philosophic half-smile, when there was an interruption.

The door was flung suddenly open, and pale, panting, furious, Edith Talbot stood on the threshold.

Jack's wife wore a Japanese wrapper, her hair was in a braid. She absorbed the picture by the fire for a long minute before she broke the silence with a clear:

"Well, so *that's* who it is, is it? That's the 'man that you had to see on business,' is it? Oh, I like that, I love it! Rose Kirby, was it——"

She advanced into the room, and Jack, who had arisen, half put his arm about her as he said, placatingly:

"Come in, dear! Rose came to see me on some important business, and——"

"Don't touch me!" Edith gasped, jerking herself away from his hand. "I was trying to sleep and I heard your voices—and heard your voices——"

The storm, raging about the corner of the house,

seemed to give the lie to this, but Edith rushed on, unnoticing:

"It was business that Clyde couldn't attend to, I suppose? No, oh, no, of course not! It was business that brought Rose Kirby out on a night like this——"

"Edith, don't be so ridiculous as to suppose that if Jack and I wanted to see each other we'd choose a time or a place like this!" Rose interrupted, half-angry and half-pleading, for something unnatural in the light in the other woman's eyes, the pallor of her face, and the difficult breathing, frightened her.

"Edith, my dear child!" It was Jack's mother speaking now, as she anxiously clasped the girl's shaking form in her arms. "Don't, dear! You know what Newman said about agitation after yesterday," she begged.

She had rushed into the room at the sound of the raised voices; now, half-pushing and half-guiding her daughter-in-law into a chair, she turned for the first time her astounded gaze upon Rose, exquisite and flushed in Jack's big wrapper, with her hair tumbling about her shoulders.

"Jack?" she asked, gravely.

"Rose has brought me very serious news, Mother," Jack said, feeling that the full explanation was the only thing for the situation now. And handing her the little contract, he sat watching her while she read it. "That was discovered yesterday," he told her, when both she and Edith had bewilderedly studied the few lines. "And Clyde Bainbridge intends to push his advantage as far as he can!" And very patiently he reviewed the whole story. Edith listened with an air of reluctant scorn. Yet she was trembling when he finished.

"I don't believe it!" she said then, turning her gaze to the fire, averting the eyes over which the lids were half-dropped, and huddling herself in her wrapper. Her whole body was still convulsed by the violence of her breathing.

"Fifty per cent.? Is that one-fiftieth of everything, Jackie?" asked his mother.

"More than that, dear. Half."

"If you're crazy enough to throw your money away like that, throw it!" Edith said, trying not to show her agitation.

"It's not my choice, Edith. This paper gives everything—everything we have—the Works—the buildings—the business—to Rose!" Jack explained.

Edith swallowed with a dry throat.

"Oh, but why do you believe it!" she exclaimed, contemptuously.

"Jackie, dear, you said half," his mother reminded him, very white.

"But there's interest, Mother, and compound interest, for almost forty years!"

"Then we will just—receive payments from the factory and not own it?" Mrs. Talbot asked, with the air of completely understanding the transaction.

"No, dear, we'll have nothing to do with the factory any more. Your son will have to support his wife and mother, as many another man has done," Jack told her, smiling. But it was a long time, and only after many patient repetitions, before she could grasp the truth.

"Jack," she faltered then, ashen, "your father wasn't—dishonest, dear?"

"No," Rose answered, quickly, "the paper was lost!"

"Ah, then I don't mind being poor," said Jack's mother, beginning to cry quietly. "We'll get some little place, dear, we'll do very well! I have that book about 'Meals for Small Incomes,' Jack, and you must let your old mother take care of you all!"

"I hope it won't come to that!" he assured her, smiling, but with his voice a little husky, nevertheless.

"I never heard such a pack of rubbish!" Edith commented in a trembling tone she tried to make negligent. But she was very pale. "Rose Kirby coming here with a trumped-up story like that, and you both swallowing it whole! She just remembered that she had that paper, I suppose, and thought she'd like to come out this pleasant summer evening and have a little neighbourly chat about it with Jack!"

"It was only found yesterday," Jack explained, gently. He reviewed the long story again.

'You'd believe anything anybody told you!" his wife assured him, sharply.

"Rose came here to tell me this herself before Clyde Bainbridge set the whole thing in motion, Edith," said Jack. "For every reason we don't want it to be made public if we can help it!"

"Oh, Mr. Bainbridge telephoned an hour ago, to ask if by any chance you were here, Rose!" Mrs. Talbot remembered suddenly. "He didn't explain, and I took it for granted that he meant that you had been kept somewhere this afternoon, by the storm! Oh, dear, oh, dear, I said that you weren't! I said that a man had come in to talk to Jack about the courts—but how should I know!"

"Thank God, you didn't!" Rose, who had turned white, said fervently. "I shall have to go back! I'll

tell him that I started to my mother's—that's true enough—and couldn't get there because I haven't any carfare!"

"Jackie—I'm dazed," his mother said, gently, staring blindly ahead of her. "Does it mean that we're paupers—that Rose Kirby owns the Iron Works over which your father worked and toiled so long? Little Rose Kirby—that you used to admire so—years ago——"

"Don't worry, dear!" he said, kneeling beside her chair to take her flat, faded figure into his arm. "What other men have done I can do!"

"But—but we've always held our heads so high—before people!" she stammered, with watering eyes.

"We'll find out who our real friends are, Mother!" he comforted her.

Rose, coming back from the shadowy background with her still damp little silk dress once more slipped over her head, and with her big coat over her arm, picked the contract from the table, and replaced it thoughtfully in its envelope.

"I will do what I can!" she said, slowly, to Jack's mother. "If Clyde will let things go on as they are, outwardly, for a while, and if Jack will go on managing things at the Works, I don't see why any one need know, except ourselves."

They all looked at her: Jack was standing half-facing the room, with his elbow on the mantel, and his forehead resting against his hand. Edith, watchful, breathed through her nostrils, gritted her teeth, and was silent. Mrs. Talbot quietly wept.

"This is your revenge, then, Rose of the World?" Jack asked, with his old smile.

"All I want!" she stammered, laughing through tears. And in the second of silence they could hear the unsatisfied screaming of the storm, and the slashing of rain, and the creaking and sweeping of the trees.

Then Edith, with a quick movement, was out of her chair and had snatched the envelope from Rose's hand before anybody could begin to suspect her intent. In another second the paper lay upon the centre log, which received it with a bellowing banner of gold flame.

"There, that's what I think of *that!*" she exclaimed, in a voice of bitter triumph, in the frozen silence of the room.

Rose was the first to speak. With a face of utter terror she turned to Jack:

"Jack! I dare not go back to him without it!" she whispered.

"Edith—my God! Do you know that Bainbridge could send you to prison for that!" Jack exclaimed.

"Oh, my God—my God!" Mrs. Talbot cried, on a long wail of utter despair.

"All right—I'll go to prison!" Edith half-sobbed, half-shouted, with a heaving chest. "I'd rather go to prison than see Rose Kirby taking my place in Gates Mill—having everyone look down on me! My father is a banker and has never done a dishonest thing in his life."

"Now, I shall have to go back with you, Rose, and explain this whole thing to Bainbridge," Jack said, gravely. "And I can make a full statement at once, of exactly the circumstances, and have it witnessed tomorrow! That will satisfy him, and we must simply face the music; all the world will know it in a few days. I'll have to promise him everything, and you will, too, poor child—if we are to save Edith!"

"I can say that I burned it," Rose suggested, still shaking with fright. "He can't—he can't kill me, Jack, and it is through me, after all, that he has this hold on you! My dear, my dear," she said, in her tender tone, with one hand upon his shoulder, and with her head, now roughly crowned again with all its ringlets and ripples in a great knot. "I'm so sorry!"

"He won't hurt you?" Jack said, quickly.

"He's never put his finger on me!" she smiled, quickly. "But it will be—bad—for a few days. My giving him full rein in the business will help. And for the rest, everything passes!" Rose finished, slipping into her coat.

"Jack——" Edith said, in a strangled tone.

Her husband and the two women who were mothers looked at her quickly, for there was something strange in her tone. Then Rose's arm was about her, and she had caught Edith's wet, agonized grip in her own, and she was half-supporting her as she said quickly:

"Jack, she's ill! Get the doctor—help me take her upstairs!"

CHAPTER XXX

Bundy and young Paul left Clyde just before nine o'clock, and it was then, with a face set like an iron mask, that he telephoned to Rose's mother, and after a second bitter and incredulous thought, to the Talbot house. He had no real suspicion of finding her there, however, and Mrs. Talbot's innocently misleading answer was reassuring.

"No, indeed, Mr. Bainbridge! Jack's just talking over a little business with a man here; it's about the tennis courts of the Country Club! He got here simply drenched! Jack's loaned him a wrapper! This isn't exactly country-club weather, is it?"

"Rose isn't out in all this storm, Clyde!" Cecy gasped, when he called the Kirby house.

"I'm not home, I'm in the office, so I don't know!" he answered, untruthfully.

"Oh, I see! And she doesn't answer? I guess she's asleep," Cecy commented, reassured. And Clyde was left to his lonely vigil again.

The wind whined, argued, attacked, and retreated. Sometimes there were ugly mutterings from the trees before the house, sometimes he could hear the fury of the storm gathering itself, far off and high above the roof, for a thundering smash of air and water. Gutters ran streams, there was a cold splashing and dripping without, and the sneaking little currents of air that made their way into the old house were cold and damp.

Clyde, wearied with loss of sleep, fatigue, excitement, and pain, felt himself scornfully to be as nervous as a woman. All day long odd voices had been sounding in his ears, and strange, undefined fears fluttering at his heart. He dozed in his chair, awoke frightened and perspiring, mended the fire, and dozed again.

The anger that was gathering in his heart against Rose was not unpleasant to him. There was almost a joy in its quiet, steady increase. He would break her for this. She would be another sort of woman after this night's work. But first she would sign what he pleased, agree to every condition he chose to make.

She had flown to her mother, of course. But what could those vacillating, ignorant women do? Ned was a stripling of twenty-one, and Ned was not home to-night. For the others, were they likely to take Rose's fantastic view of this windfall, and if they chose to claim their heritage, who could represent them but Clyde?

He would not wrong them, he would not rob them; he merely asked for control of their interests. And with that power he could make them all rich—make himself the most important man in Gates Mill!

If he touched the child—his child as well as hers—Rose would be instantly a writhing mass of subjection and entreaty at his feet. And she should learn that she might not play fast and loose with him!

Another furious onslaught of wind and water; he thought he heard the front door slam; she would see the light from the sitting room, and she would not dare to go upstairs without an explanation. Clyde faced the hall door expectantly, thinking every second that the knob would turn, and Rose come in.

But the seconds went by, and were moments, and Clyde, staring fixedly at the door, in the gaslighted, warm, ugly room, became gradually aware of a sensation that filled his mouth with water, and dried his throat, and made the cold sweat stand out on his hands.

Somebody—behind him—was looking at him!

He seemed unable to stir a muscle, but his heart took a sick downward plunge of utter terror. All the horrors of the previous night returned, the fright he had had, of someone being at the window, the battering at the side door.

There was a pistol in his upper right-hand dresser drawer; he thought of it now. But to move himself, and so perhaps increase his agony of fright, and provoke someone—something—else simultaneously to movement seemed beyond his power.

There was a hideous silence in the room, and the loud crashing and seeping of the elements continued without.

Then Clyde heard a knock at the window pane.

He turned, like one in a horrible enchantment, and saw a rain-streaming face, eyes—in the blowing blackness of ivy leaves and night, with the placid gaslight reflected against them.

Could it be Rose? he thought, with a great uprushing emotion of relief. Rose, who couldn't make the doorbell ring, perhaps. Ah, if it were only amiable, patient little Rose—so anxious to make everything smooth and right——

"Rose——!" he stammered, moving stiffly toward the window. His heart turned to water; he halted halfway.

For the window was now slowly pushed up from the sill, and it was the leonine, rain-drenched form of Rose's magnificent old grandfather that was revealed there.

Old Tallifer's white mane was soaked, his face was blown into more than its ordinary ruddiness by the storm that swept into the room from behind him and made the gas stagger and scream, blew Clyde's papers from the table, and scattered them on the dull drugget of the floor.

He folded his great arms upon the window sill and regarded Clyde steadily above them with a terrible smile. And into the younger man's icy heart came a sickening sense of prescience. Had he done this before? Was this the outcome of all the fears and shadows that had been following him for so long?

Moving like a man in a dream Clyde, aroused and revived by the cold rush of wild air, came toward the window, with the intention of closing it.

"Come round by the door, Tallifer!" he said, in a voice he tried to make steady, thinking of the stairs and a rush for the pistol. "I'll let you in! Can't stand this cold air!" added Clyde, with teeth that chattered, but not from the cold. "I could shoot him down like a dog, entering my house at this hour of the night!" he thought, trembling.

He was close to the window when one of the great arms shot in from the wild dark and uproar of the night, and gripped his wrist as if it had been a child's wrist, and pulled him from his feet. The ugly bright room, the papered walls, the sleeping fire, and the blown papers revolved in one hideous panorama before Clyde's eyes; he screamed out in sudden horror and despair.

"Rose—*Rose!*"

Then it was all blackness; crashing, convulsed blackness, and the furious sweeping of black rain, and the crackling of boughs in the dark.

CHAPTER XXXI

To THE Talbot house, meanwhile, had come one of those strange endless nights of change and bewilderment that make milestones in the peaceful domestic histories of comfortable village homes. There were fires and lights everywhere; all the servants were awake and fully dressed and quietly busy. There was a trained nurse, yawning as she buttoned her cuffs and pinned her big apron, but immediately afterward all business and efficiency.

Edith's father and mother had been summoned, had arrived anxious but cheerful. Mrs. Newman was there with the doctor, and the Terrys; and Judge Raymond, who had been playing bridge with the elder Rogerses when the news of Edith's sudden illness came, had also stopped in in neighbourly fashion.

These, arriving blown and breathless in the wild storm, had found Rosalind Bainbridge waiting downstairs with Mrs. Talbot, the two women murmuring over the fire. Everything was—well, everything was all right, Rose and Edith's mother-in-law had said. They would be glad when it was over, of course. But everything was all right! This was the nervous time; one simply had to get through it as best one might. Nothing to worry about.

This at midnight. This, only slightly more anxious and less confident, at one o'clock. Jack had come downstairs then, rather pale, and with his hair tumbled,

and had asked Rose if she had heard from her husband. He must see Clyde.

"And Clyde must know I am here!" Rose had said, in an anxious undertone, drawing Jack aside, and so stricken by the sight of the tumbled hair upon his damp forehead, the wild, distracted look in his eyes, and his demoralized aspect generally, that she could quite unself-consciously lay a hand upon his arm. "Our telephone must have been broken—anyway, it doesn't answer, and no wonder, in such a gale! Is there any one—any way in which we can send word?"

"I must see Clyde," Jack had answered, abstracted eyes moving restlessly in space. And presently, as the doctor quite obviously wished to employ and distract him during this hard time, and as old Judge Raymond was eager to accompany him, they had set off in the wildest night that Gates Mill had ever known, to battle the two short blocks to Rose's house, and explain to her husband that Edith's illness and the weather had combined to keep her at the Talbots' overnight.

They had come back, soaked and cold and rosy, in half-an-hour, bringing with them, to Rose's astonishment, little Mary, rolled in a blanket, rain-spattered, wakeful, and brimming with conversation.

The house, old Judge Raymond reported, had been locked fast, but light had been streaming from the sitting-room window across the strip of garden above the cliff, and they had finally climbed in there, finding the room blown and deserted. They had explored from room to room, finding no sign of Clyde, and finally deciding to bring the baby to her mother.

"Clyde probably went out in a hurry——" Rose had murmured, speculatively, drying and kissing the

baby in a deep sort of tranquil ecstasy before the fire. Her thoughts had followed her husband clearly, yet oddly without terror or fear now. He had left the house in one of his tantrums, of course. He was raging his way down to her mother's now, or raging it home again. But somehow Clyde did not seem to come near her at all, in this peaceful hour of firelight and motherhood, and of the good sharing of neighbourly anxieties and joys.

The other women came and went, making little errands to the sickroom or the kitchen. It was almost two o'clock when suddenly, with the force of a thunderbolt, it became somehow simultaneously known that matters upstairs were not, as they had been saying all evening, "all right," that things were not going "as one had to expect."

Jack's voice murmuring at the telephone agitatedly, Doctor Newman upstairs, the maids running, gathering to whisper, running again; the doorbell, and a second doctor—old Doctor White, rosy and grave—everybody saying, "her heart—it's nothing—it's quite natural—her heart——"

Rose saw all this, heard it, felt her own heart beat quick with sympathy for the other woman's danger. Ah, it was a hard time—it was a bewildering time——

She carried the drowsy Mary to the library couch, and was cautiously shutting the door, when 'Gusta, going upstairs with a smoking kettle of water, told her that the baby was dead.

"It's Miss Edie they're scared for now," said 'Gusta in an odd lifeless tone that was beyond all sorrow or emotion.

For a long moment Rose stood perfectly still in the

dim hallway. Then she heard Mrs. Rogers's voice—somewhere near, yet the words were all choked and indistinguishable and ended in a long moan. Then a door closed upstairs.

Rose went back into the quiet sitting room; there were no murmuring voices, no hopeful predictions now. The women sat silent, looking fearfully at each other, starting at any slight noise from above. Mrs. Terry, with her kindly blanched face and grizzled hair, Judge Raymond looking grave and old, Mrs. Newman, the doctor's wife, all looked up as she slipped into a chair, and then silence fell again.

The fire burned steadily, with brisk little flames gnawing at the thick oak logs. The comfortable, homely room, with its books and its photographs, its jars of chrysanthemums and late roses, its odour of white violets, seemed to be waiting. There was a large framed photograph of Edith in her wedding dress on the mantel, her boyish little figure and dark face looking immature in the swathing satin and veils. Rose's head felt confused and weary, she leaned back in her chair and half-closed her eyes.

Suddenly the door opened, and Doctor Newman came in with Jack Talbot. Jack was apparently listening, or trying to listen, to something the doctor was saying; his anxious face, painfully concentrated upon the other's words, was aged as by some terrible and devastating wind.

He looked at the women before the fire apathetically. They all stood, expectant. And as he turned vaguely to go away, Jack said lifelessly:

"Dead."

His mother, coming in from the dining room, broke

into something like a moan and caught at his arm. He put her hand aside and she turned sharply to the doctor.

"Not——?" she asked, quickly, alarmedly, in a whisper. The others watched his face for the answer.

"Yes," the doctor said, briefly and quietly, and Mrs. Raymond broke into bitter crying. "Ah, my God, I'm sorry!" the doctor said, slowly.

"Doctor?" Rose whispered, her face ashen, "not Edith, too?"

Jack, seeming dazed, walked through the room and into the dining room beyond, and the doctor, left behind, said quickly, in an almost abstracted tone:

"Yes—she couldn't rally. It was the heart, at the end. She had no idea of it, poor Edith—poor little girl! She looked at Jack," Newman said, not addressing anybody and staring at the fire, "and said, 'I've got to be awfully sweet to you now, dear, to set my little girl an example!' and then she just turned over as if she were going to sleep. Her mother's there, but I sent her father up to bring her away."

"The baby?" Rose breathed.

"It didn't live at all!" he answered, rather with the shaking of his head than in audible words. "Well, these things have to be," the doctor said, heavily, "these things have to be. Poor child, I warned her when I came yesterday that there must be absolute quiet—absolute rest. She couldn't do it—it wasn't in her!"

"It isn't—somehow—believable," Judge Raymond boomed, in his deep, sympathetic voice.

"Heard from Clyde, Rose? He can help Jack out with a lot of business matters," the doctor said, pushing back his rumpled hair wearily.

"No," Rose answered in a low tone, "Judge Raymond and Jack went to our house, you know—this was, oh, two hours ago! when we just thought that Edith——"

She stopped short, arrested by the thought that so brief a time had wrought so incredible a change, and said pitifully:

"It's a sad way to go, isn't it?"

"She didn't know it—there wasn't any suffering at the end; she just went to sleep like a baby," the doctor said again.

"Well, it was when it just seemed as if everything was going along normally," Rosalind resumed, "that the Judge and Jack went over to my house—you know how useless husbands are, then, and Jack was very nervous. They had tried and tried to telephone, but Clyde didn't answer. And they found the window wide open in the sitting room, and the wind and rain pouring in, and not a sign of Clyde. Doesn't that seem odd? He must have gone to my mother's house, but we telephoned there and they hadn't seen him—Cecy said that he had telephoned an hour before, but she had got the impression that he was at the office. But I know Clyde wasn't at the office to-night, unless he went there in all this storm with Joe Bundy. And even then he wouldn't leave the window open and the lights going!"

"He didn't come here?" the doctor said.

"He didn't know I was here," Rose answered. "I came to talk about a little business—business of my grandfather's—with Jack," she added, hesitatingly, "and while I was here poor Edith was taken sick! Jack and the Judge brought Mary back, rolled in a blanket, because they didn't like to leave her alone in the house."

"We were playing five hundred at the Raymonds'; I had been worried about Edith, too," the doctor said, grave and youthful and disturbed. "Thank you, Della!" he said to his wife, who, red-eyed and solemn, brought him a smoking cup of coffee.

"The servants are all up," said Della Newman, wide-eyed. "Did you ever see such a terrible night! Poor Mrs. Rogers simply collapsed; she's lying in the spare room, and Mr. Rogers is with her. They thought the world and all of Edith! Amy telephoned, and she and Fred are coming right over."

"I shall have to stay, of course," Mrs. Raymond said, solemnly and sympathetically. "I had Edith Rogers in my arms before she had her first bath—dear, dear, dear. You never know."

"It seems as if we were all in a dream," Rose said, her senses almost stunned with the violent successive emotions of the last forty-eight hours.

Presently she went to get the waking Mary, went quietly about the strangely animated house, where lights, and moving figures, and hushed voices turned the blackness of the stormy night into an unnatural semblance of daytime. Despite her weariness and the confusion of her mind there was something soberly satisfying to Rose in this atmosphere of neighbourly coöperation, of friendliness and calm.

Women talked sadly in the dining room in low tones; there was weeping in the upper hall; strange men came in, in muddy boots, and opened and shut doors cautiously. Outside was still the whining wind, and the slashing, dripping, trickling coldness of the rain.

To-morrow, thought Rose, life and Clyde must be faced again. But to-night she and her child were shut

by sorrow and storm into this little community of safe love and sympathy, and her exhausted soul found peace here.

A strange panorama of memories went back and forth in her weary brain, as after the Newmans had gone home she sat quietly by the fire, keeping the death vigil in country fashion with Amy and Mrs. Terry and the Judge's wife. Young Fred Rogers, Edith's brother, and her father were talking with Jack in the dining room; Mrs. Rogers had been given a sedative powder and was deeply, heavily sleeping upstairs. Mrs. Talbot alternately tried to lie down and get some rest, and came tearfully down to the fireside group protesting that she could not rest.

"Rose, will you give us five minutes in the study?" Jack said at about four o'clock, appearing in the dining-room door. He looked white, his eyes were red-rimmed, and his hair in disorder. But he was perfectly composed. He and the old Judge and Rose crossed the hall, and Rose took the chair she had occupied a few hours—half a lifetime!—ago, and looked seriously and expectantly from one man to another.

Jack started the fire again while he said:

"I've explained to the Judge exactly what occurred here to-night, Rose. It seems Clyde took the document to him to-day, and he feels—as I do—that it is probably valid. If it had ever been cancelled, my father would have made that public, fast enough, but the circumstance of the accident to your grandfather occurring so soon after this arrangement was made, and my father's last talk with Clyde, look as if it was not cancelled. I've told the Judge that it was destroyed to-night," Jack said, steadily, "but that I stand ready

to turn over every cent of my holdings and my mother's in any fashion you think best, or at any time. Clyde may want to fight, but without the contract I don't see how he can. You will have to come to the best understanding you can with him about it——"

"I congratulate you upon becoming a rich woman overnight, Rose," the Judge said, with old-fashioned courtesy, "although of course this is very surprising —and very sad news, too, to me. But Clyde will, of course, do the square and gentlemanly thing," he added, a little awkwardly, clearing his throat, "and I hope there will always be a Talbot in the old Works, for sentiment's sake, if for no other! Jack proposes to make a statement, in Clyde's presence, and before a notary——"

They discussed the business aspects of it for some moments, Rose's serious eyes upon Jack's weary face the while, and then, as they turned to leave the study, she said to him:

"You couldn't lie down here and rest, Jack? You look so utterly exhausted."

"I don't know why I should," he answered, sensibly. "I feel more—more shocked than tired. I feel—dazed——! We always treated Edith's recklessness as a sort of joke, you know," he added with bewildered pathos to Rose, as the Judge left them alone in the little study. "Fred was just saying that only last night Amy was teasing her and asked her if she wanted a circus rider in the family! It seems now that we might have saved her if we had had any suspicion——! I did think, two or three times, that she might lose her baby, and I said so——"

"Jack, you were a good husband to her!" Rose said,

suddenly, blue eyes raised to his face and one hand laid on his shoulder as she stood close before him.

"We didn't see this end to the road, did we, Rose?" he asked her, after a moment of silence.

"No, life seemed so sure to be happy!" she answered, frowning a little. "What we did didn't seem so important."

"Rose, will Clyde make this hard for you?"

"Not——" she hesitated. "Not any harder than it is always!" she admitted, wrinkling her forehead. "But—but somehow to-night has clarified it all in my mind, Jack," she went on, feeling for her words. "I feel as if, somehow, I've grown up! All the old jealousy of Edith, and of all you people of Upper River Street, seems so petty, now! I wanted to be rich. I wanted to be one of you, I wanted to make you sorry—I've done it all! And yet life is harder and sadder for me now than I ever dreamed that it could be. That's what I've learned, to pick it up as it is, and to be patient, and live for other people if I can't for myself! I'm going to use my own judgment in all this, Jack—it seems so simple now, yet it was all so utterly mixed up yesterday! I shall tell Mom and Cecy and Ned everything, I shall insist that they know all about it, and then we will work it out as best we can. And I know that when Clyde realizes how utterly brutal it would be to give you any fresh trouble now, just the respect of other people—it means so much to him!—will persuade him to do as I ask!"

"I may leave Gates Mill," Jack told her, indifferently, "unless my mother may be spared what will hurt her and shame her here. Otherwise, I may go over to Terry. Isn't it a curious thing that he wants me?"

"No, I don't think it's curious!" Rose said, quickly, with the shadow of a smile twitching her lovely mouth.

He quite suddenly and seriously put his arms about her slender shoulders, and brought the beautiful roundness and softness and fragrance that was the living woman close to him. Rose was pale, and in the creamy pallor of the beautifully modelled face her eyes shone darkly in faint blue shadows. The careless sweep of her rich hair lent a certain youthful sadness and dignity to her whole aspect as she looked straight into Jack's eyes.

"What do you suppose the *next* six years will bring us, Rose of the World?" Jack said.

"Sometimes I wonder. Do you think, Jack, that one ever has a second chance? Do you suppose one might begin now—as we might have begun then—and build better?"

"We could try, dear!" he answered, with a faint frown. "But when I am with you I feel that I could try anything, Rose! And then afterward, it all seems confused and hard again!" he added, simply.

"I know!" she said. And then suddenly: "Is it almost morning?"

They went to the window, and raised the shade. The storm had lulled suddenly to peace, the wind close to the earth was dead, but high up in the stony dark above wild airs were racing, and the great steel-gray and iron-gray clouds were being tumbled roughly toward the west. Over the saturated garden the first cold uncertain light of dawn was breaking, the garden trees were taking a dull, vague shape, there was no light anywhere, no colour; but presently there would be the God-given morning, the deepening bright-

ness upon a wholesome, normal world, the sound of wheels and voices, and colour—colour—colour again.

"Thanksgiving morning, Rose," Jack said, soberly.

Suddenly there was a strangely disquieting sound of many footsteps on the porch outside. The doorbell was rung repeatedly and agitatedly in the house of death, despite the great bow of violet satin ribbon that had been tied there. Jack and Rosalind, going out into the hall, were met by the other men and women coming from the sitting room, all of whose faces reflected their own surprise and uneasiness.

Someone opened the door; there were four or five of the town men there, unrecognizable yet familiar faces that somehow suggested to Rose the new barber—the fruitman from State Street—that cousin of Agnes Parrott—the man who always made up their faces for "Golden West Week"—old Paul from the Works——

Something was said, there were confused exclamations, she caught the word "accident!" repeated and repeated, she heard one of the women wail, and heard old Paul say, "He done it in the office no later than yesterday—stumbled like he'd fall——!"

Her head began to buzz; they were all looking at her oddly, and some man's arm was tight about her shoulders supporting her. Her bewildered gaze went from one kindly, horrified, concerned face to another, and she felt the ground plunging beneath her feet, and the crowded hallway go black before her eyes.

Then her mouth was dry, and a loudly sobbing servant had run out with Mary, bewildered and crying. Rose put her arms about the child automatically, looking blankly from one of the horror-stricken faces to the other.

"Your husband has been hurt, dear," Doctor Newman said, with his arm tight about her shoulders. "I want you to be brave, now—Rose—you're going to take this bravely, dear——"

Her eyes slowly circled the group, slowly came to his own, close above her shoulder. She made her lips move, but no sound came. Deep within herself everything seemed to have stopped—breath, heart, senses, voice. She made a sick, plunging effort to speak.

"What—has it—to do with me?" she whispered, her eyes clinging to his.

"It's Clyde, dear. They think he fell. Over the cliff, Rose—the cliff with the window just above it, that they found open. They don't know, Rose dear—I'm only telling you what they think——"

"They——?" Her voice was only a whisper; sharp in the strained and unnatural silence of the hall.

"They found him down by the old quarry, Rose," Newman said, gently, watching her closely.

Her whitened lips said the word "Dead?" but there was no sound. Once again her eyes went about from face to face. Then she slipped against the doctor, stumbled, caught herself, and wavered again, down into the comforting darkness—down—where was she? What had happened? Why should she, Rose Bainbridge, be fainting weakly—disgracefully—before all these strange people in the Talbots' front hall?

CHAPTER XXXII

CECILY was sitting placidly beside her when she fully awakened, and for a moment Rose fancied happily that she was back in her own old room again. It seemed good to see little Cecily so placidly embroidering——

But immediately memory came back, and she started awake, saying anxiously:

"Cecily, did you hear that poor Edith—— But where am I?"

The second inquiry interrupted the first; for these cheerfully papered walls and gay chintzes, while not utterly unfamiliar, were in no room that Rose had ever before occupied.

"Now, just be calm—darling," said Cecily, in terror of a scene. "It's all right—it's—darling, you're all right!"

"Mary——" Rose said, looking about wildly.

"Mary is sound asleep, right here. You're all right, I tell you, Rose!" Cecily assured her, eagerly, kneeling beside her now, with her arms about her. "You're at Amy Rogers'——"

"Ah——!" Rose breathed, deeply weary and content. The heavenly sunshine was slanting in, gloriously clear and bright through bare winter boughs, a wood fire was crackling hearteningly, and there was an unearthly peace and quiet all about. "How did I get here?" she asked, opening her eyes.

"They brought you—you remember——!" Cecy said, almost reproachfully. "Don't you remember?"

"But—but where were you, sweetheart?"

"Bozzy came for me, and I must say I think it was intelligent of him," Cecy said, approvingly, yet with a wary look of not shocking her sister with too many revelations at once.

"Bozzy? But—but what day is it?"

Cecy assumed a maternal air, and began to pat her sister's hand.

"You remember the ghastly gale last night?" she began.

Rosalind's eyes darkened. She nodded.

"Well," resumed her sister, "you remember that you were at the Talbots'? You'd—had you had dinner with them?"

"I had gone over there—on business," Rose explained, intelligence returning to her eyes, "I remember it all, Cecy. That is, about poor Edith, and then Mary being brought in by Judge Raymond—but that was before——" she interrupted herself, frowning faintly.

"Do you remember them telling you about Clyde?" Cecy said, boldly. "That he had fallen from the sitting-room window?"

Rosalind put her fingers over her eyes, sank back against the pillows.

"Oh, yes—I do remember now," she said, in a hushed voice. "Yes, I do remember all those people——"

And for two or three minutes she lay perfectly still, while Cecy, a little scared, watched her uneasily.

"Let me tell you what Bozzy did!" Cecy presently burst out in a cheerful tone. "He was up half the night on account of poor Edith——

"He was up half the night on account of poor Edith,"

she repeated, anxiously, as her sister did not stir. But suddenly Rose opened her weary great eyes, and looked at her with something almost like the old, sisterly, encouraging smile, and Cecy went on, relievedly: "and he was down in River Street with his car, taking the nurse home, when he saw the crowd by the old quarry."

Rose, her eyes again covered, visibly shuddered, and Cecy continued, hurriedly:

"The minute he realized what it was, he came for me. Now don't you think that was wonderful of him? We heard him banging and knocking—it was just dawn, and Gramp was starting breakfast for himself—you know how he does? He had been sort of excited by the storm last night, but he got home and got to bed before I did—Ethel was with me, and we were talking Well, I went flying down—and you can imagine the excitement! I leaped into my clothes, and Bozzy took me straight to the Talbots'; you had fainted, and they had you in the library."

"I remember fainting——" Rose said, slowly and dreamily.

"Well," Cecily said, simply, "that's all!"

"All——?" Rose repeated, shutting her eyes.

"Mary," Cecy offered, after a pause in which her thoughts had ranged from one exciting fact to another. "Mary was just wound *up*. She had a sort of supper with us here, downstairs in Amy's kitchen, at four o'clock—she didn't go off until five, and then I lay down beside her, and got some sleep. Don't you remember Bozzy and Doctor Newman bringing you over here and the doctor giving you something to make you sleep?"

"Vaguely," Rose said, moving her weary eyes about

the room, and resting them on Cecy's face with something like a child's peaceful smile in their luminous depths. "Oh, Cecy, this seems to be so *restful!*" she murmured, holding tight to her sister's hand.

"Rose," Cecy said, in a burst, "you *can't* feel badly. Clyde made your life a perfect burden, and you were always an angel to him! Rose, shall you wear a veil? It was death by an accidental fall—that's what Bozzy told me the coroner said this morning," continued Cecy, interestedly. "Everyone's talking about it, and of course the town is simply wild with excitement. Gramp came here with Audrey—they'd been walking—this was an hour ago. It must be nearly noon now. And Gramp was so polite, and he looked so nice—only he asked for old Mr. Talbot, and he was talking about that everlasting horse. He told Mrs. Terry that Si Talbot's horse wasn't good for anything but crow's meat—you can imagine what she thought! And Mom was here, and she's coming back!"

"Mom——" Rosalind said, her lips suddenly trembling. After the long strain, the shocks and terrors of the night, she felt that it would be good to have normal living begin again—good to see loyal old wandering-witted Gramp, and little brown-skinned Audrey, good to have Mary trotting about the room—good above all to see her mother.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Some months later Rosalind came out of the post office, with Mary's warm, soft little hand in hers, just as Jack Talbot came up the street in his car. Rose wore black and looked slender and young under her broad-brimmed plain hat; Mary danced in a soft little brown sweater and a furry little brown hat.

Jack stopped his car when he saw them, and they talked for a moment, the man at his wheel, Rose standing on the sidewalk close beside him.

It was the day that seems the first of spring; a day of lilacs, and long shadows, and lengthening lights, and green, green fields. Spring was sweet over River Street, and over the plumy, high-topped trees of Upper River Street; the acacias were gold with bloom, the air was warm and still. And spring was sweet over the old Pierce house, where paperers and plasterers and upholsterers and gardeners were all busy, making a new home for the Kirbys.

Mrs. Kirby and her harmless old father, and the leaping Audrey, and Cecily and Rose were to be found there almost all day long, eating a picnic lunch among the trimmed shrubs of the splendid old garden, inspecting cream-coloured woodwork and French glass doors.

But to-day Rose had left them, to walk downtown with her daughter; she was quite consciously lingering now, savouring the afternoon life of the little town she so loved; the youngsters in Crosset's candy store, the

fruit stalls, Bond's windows, the dirty little mud-spattered cars coming and going. It was all so friendly —so homely and familiar and good.

She and Jack had had some business talks during the course of the winter; usually with Judge Raymond or her mother as audience. But Jack had been gone for a business trip of several weeks now, and Rose's heart moved oddly when she caught sight of the shabby big brown overcoat, and the lean, florid face, and saw that he was home again.

Her old seat beside him was empty, and as Rose looked at him, for a dazzled minute she felt that her girlhood had come back; the old happy sense of feeling that everything was friendly, right, that all Gates Mill, with the swinging bakery doors and the sauntering crowds, was oddly and intimately her own, and that Jack Talbot loved her, and that it was all like a fairy tale!

Then she saw the touches of silver in his thick hair, and the lines about mouth and eyes, and she felt the clasp of Mary's little hand, Mary, for whose exquisite sweetness she had paid so high a price. And she saw her own black sleeve.

"It might be six or seven years ago, Rose of the World," Jack said, reading her thoughts, "and you and I going to a movie this evening, and to have chocolate milk shakes after!"

"And Mom back in Old Mill Lane," Rose added, her eyes shining, "and Cecy and Ned wanting to tag us to the theatre!"

"Lord, those were happy times," Jack said. And in an undertone he added, "Ass—ass—ass that I was!"

"I didn't have much sense," Rose admitted, also half

to herself. She looked down at his big hand in the familiar old tan glove. "That is," she added, without resentment, "everything was against me—in a way. Mom had never given me any special training—we were a shiftless, happy-go-lucky sort of crowd——"

"You were always the most wonderful person in the world," Jack said, as she paused. "Always the sweetest—the most loving—— Do you realize that I have not seen you, alone, for a long, long while?" he added. "Could I—sometime?"

"Anytime," Rose said, the clear colour staining through her warm cheeks.

"What are you doing now?"

"Meeting Ned. He gets home for Easter Week to-night! He's grown to be such a satisfaction, Jack. We're moving into the new house to-morrow, and he'll be a great help."

"He seemed so at Christmas," Jack answered. "You are to meet him on the six-eighteen? But it's only a little after five now. Could you take a little drive with me?"

For answer she walked about the car and got into her familiar seat, with Mary seated erect and expectant upon her lap. Jack glanced at her in something like reverence; the glowing face under the broad-brimmed black hat, the aureole of burned-gold hair. But as they turned out of River Street neither spoke.

"There's Rose Kirby bein' druv home by Jack Talbot, Pa," said Mrs. Chess Parrott, with deep satisfaction, coming out of the drug store to the Ford at the muddy curb. "Jest like I says——"

"I see Jack Talbot's back, and he had Rose Kirby and the little girl drivin' with him," Kate Connor, the

dressmaker, remarked to Miss Gately, of the Library, as they came out of Crosset's.

"Well, I guess folks are sorter expectin' that, God bless her heart," Miss Gately returned, blinking down into the dying spring sunshine of River Street.

"Just passed Jack Talbot driving Rose Kirby and Mary somewheres," Sally Towsey, the seamstress by the day, said to Doc Boggs, in the post office. "Well, Talbot or no Talbot, there ain't any one in town too good for her!"

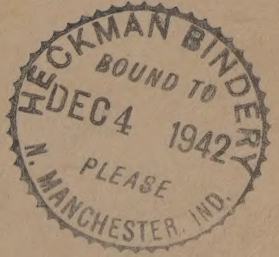
"I guess you said something, Sally. My wife says she hopes to goodness they'll make a match of it," the old veterinary returned, interestedly. "There's two I like to see together, Doc," he added to Doctor Newman, who came in for his letters.

"Jack and Rose Kirby?" Newman said, smiling, as he lingered on the paper-strewn, wide steps. "They're a nice-looking pair."

Old Tallifer, murmuring, feeble-witted, happy, had come along, and now he bowed to the group in his stately, old-fashioned manner, the sinking sunshine glinting upon his silvered mane of hair and the flowing full beard.

"See my Rose and young Talbot going off in the automobile?" he asked. And he added, contentedly: "It's a real nice day. I don't know that there's a nicer place in the world than Gates Mill—come spring."

THE END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